Managing the Dominions : the Dominions Office and the Second World War, 1939-1942

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ABSTRACT

Established in 1925, the Dominions Office (DO) existed as a separate Whitehall body for just twenty-two years. The primary reason for its creation was to provide a dedicated conduit through which the British government could communicate with its counterparts in the now semi-autonomous Dominions. At the request of these self-governing colonies, a section of the Colonial Office (CO) had performed a similar role since shortly after the turn of the century. But in certain British quarters it was believed that the Dominions required still greater recognition, something which separate representation would help promote. During the 1930's, as the British Empire continued its slow contraction, the DO enthusiastically embraced its new task despite criticism of its performance from both home and abroad. However, with the outbreak of a second World War the requirement placed upon it became much more urgent and extensive. In an environment in which disagreements increasingly emerged between the central authority in London and its Dominion counterparts, the department repeatedly found itself handling the crisis management of events. Indeed on such occasions, during a number of which it seemed the unity of the Imperial coalition was wavering, it was the DO's skill which proved decisive. By 1942, thanks largely to these efforts and the perceptive leadership of the Dominions Secretary, Lord Cranborne, there appeared little danger of the Anglo-Dominion alliance collapsing. The political connection between the centre and the distant 'Dominions over the seas' had however irrevocably changed, a reality that would soon be demonstrated following the war's eventual end.

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been something of a resurgence of interest in attempting to define the Dominion 'concept' or 'idea'.[1] Since the late 1930s and the first serious attempts by K.C.Wheare and W.K.Hancock, it has been clear that discussion of the subject has often been both complicated and open to wide and varying interpretation.[2] Indeed amongst even contemporary observers there was a great deal of reluctance to settle upon a precise definition. During a parliamentary debate in 1921, when David Lloyd George asked for an explanation he was told that to provide one would be dangerous.[3] A decade later, a leading Australian politician expressed a commonly held view when he compared his own country's connection with Britain to that of a family. And as such he did not 'want the relations of myself and my children to be determined by rules written in a book, to which each of us must refer to discover who is right and who is wrong'.[4] A plethora of articles from the period, such as *'The Riddle of the Commonwealth'*, only serve to make it clear, however, the considerable confusion that existed about the exact nature of the relationship.[5]

Following the First World War however it was certainly the case that the relationship had altered not least because of the Dominion contribution to the Allied war effort. At the beginning of the conflict the British Empire covered some 13 million square miles within which there were nearly 500 million inhabitants. From this total the four white Dominions alone provided over 1,309,000 men sending troops to fight not just in France but to every front in which fighting took place, from Samoa to Siberia. Vimy,

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[1] See John Darwin, 'A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in British Politics' in Judith M.Brown and Wm.Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV - The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: 1999) pp.64-87; W.David McIntyre, 'The Strange Death of Dominion Status' in Robert D.King and Robert Kilson (eds.), *The Statecraft of British Imperialism: Essays in Honour of Wm.Roger Louis* (London: 1999) pp.193-195; also Fred Nash, 'Salutem adferre reipublicae' *(Cicero): the Dominion Concept and the Empire* (BISA/PSA Political Science Group Workshop Conference) July 1998

[2] See K.C.Wheare, *The Statute of Westminster and Dominion Status* (London: 1942); W.K.Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Nationality, 1918-1936* (London: 1937); also D.K.Fieldhouse, 'Autochthonous Elements in the Evolution of Dominion Status: The Case of New Zealand', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Volume 1 (1961-1963) pp.85-87

[3] K.C.Wheare, *The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth* (London: 1960) pp.10-11

[4] J.D.Latham speaking in the Australian federal parliament in 1931 quoted in W.R.Brock, *Britain and the Dominions* (Cambridge: 1951) pp.415-416

[5] W.Y.Elliot, 'The Riddle of the British Commonwealth', Foreign Affairs, Volume 8, Number 3 (1930), pp.442-464

Gallipoli and Delville Wood were just some of the celebrated battles in which the Dominion forces played a prominent part. New Zealand alone voluntarily sent about 20 percent of its male population abroad. And with such a high level of involvement casualties were high with 150,000 Dominion troops dead or missing by the conflict's conclusion. Australia, with a total population of only about five million people, suffered more casualties than the United States.[6] This in part was because, as one commentator writing in 1939 put it, Dominions forces were used as 'shock troops'. Field Marshal Douglas Haig was even said to have considered the Dominion units to be his most prized assets with the New Zealanders at the head of the list.[7] Indeed they were recognised in some quarters to have excellent 'mental as well as physical qualities' and their prominent role was 'an unconscious tribute to the democratic spirit that animated them all'.[8]

The war also highlighted the need for a far more serious approach to Imperial economic questions. Figures for trade between Britain and its Empire before 1914 reveal a mixed picture. Just under one quarter of all imports came from the Empire: staples were especially significant with foodstuffs such as tea, cheese and spices all being major imports; certain raw materials were also significant most obviously jute and tin. Exports were different however with just under 200 million pounds, or 37.2 percent of all goods, going to the Empire. Although India was perhaps the largest market, the Dominions also took a significant share. The Empire was useful as a market for goods that faced major international competition. The point has been made however that the pattern of imports was such that the Empire could not offer any real measure of independence to Britain in terms of a guaranteed supply of essential imports.[9]

The *Final Report of the Dominions Royal Commission*, released in 1917, recommended that there be greater exploitation of Dominion resources. To better do this, it called for

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[6] Max Beloff, *Imperial Sunset, Volume One: Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897-1921* (New York: 1970) pp.191-193

[7] See Robert Holland, 'The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918' in Judith M.Brown and Wm.Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, pp.125-130

[8] 'The Dominions at War', United Empire, Number 30 (1939), pp.1054-1057

[9] See D.K.Fieldhouse 'The Metropolitan Economics of Empire' in Judith M.Brown and Wm.Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, pp.98-102

the formation of an Imperial Development Board to ensure closer co-operation between the different parts of the Empire. The 1917 Imperial War Conference adopted a similar approach agreeing the creation of an Imperial Mineral Resources Bureau. It was believed that this would help ensure there was no longer just a reliance on the central industrial base in Britain. It has been argued that despite these efforts, the results were mixed such was the growing strength of nationalism within the Dominions.[10] Nonetheless it is clear that after 1919 the 'white Empire' did play a much greater role in Britain's trade. At the Imperial Conference of 1923, the Dominions had been urged to accumulate sterling assets as London funds. At the same time there was a steady growth in trade throughout the 1920s, the advantages given to the Dominions at the 1932 Ottawa Conference had a considerable impact; the year before the British authorities had also imposed a 10 percent duty on all goods imported from non-Commonwealth countries. Following Ottawa there was a considerable increase in trade with 41.2 percent of all Britain's exports between 1934 and 1938 going to the Dominions and one-quarter of all goods imported into the British market.

In the case of the most recent published discussions of the subject, whilst each adopts a generally different approach, a consensus emerges in the suggestion that 'Dominion Status', as it was to become known, was a halfway house between colonial and independent status. The Imperial Conference of 1926 certainly appeared to offer a similar assessment. Lord Balfour's famous declaration, later embodied in the Statute of Westminster, identified Great Britain and the Dominions as autonomous communities within the British Empire, united by a common allegiance to the Crown, but freely associated and equal in status to one another in all matters domestic and external.[11] Six countries, aside from Britain, helped make up this unique group. Previously considered as 'self-governing colonies', at the 1907 Colonial Conference it had been agreed that the term 'Dominion' was to be used when referring to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Cape Colony, Natal and Transvaal. The last three joined together with the Orange Free State in 1910 to form the Union of South Africa, creating a single Dominion. Twelve years later the creation of the Irish Free State would bring with it the last of the pre-war Dominions.

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[10] Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: 1972) p117-120

[11] See Patrick Walker, *The Commonwealth* (London: 1962) pp.97-116

The management of this group, which together were known as 'the British Commonwealth of Nations', has been a far less popular subject for study.[12] With its establishment in 1925, it was in fact the intended role of the Dominion Office's (DO) to secure the co-operation of these Dominions, where necessary, in carrying out British policies. From the outset however the department faced considerable challenges. Perhaps the most immediate was the fact that, according to one of the DO's own people, not everybody in Whitehall was willing 'to accept the full implications of equal partnership'.[13] Put in another fashion, this meant that for the majority of the twenty-two years it existed, with only limited resources and manpower, the department's often difficult job was to try and reconcile the agendas of seven different governments, its own being one of them. Indeed the DO often found itself having 'to act as the conscience of the British government to ensure that they lived up to their part of the bargain'.

Making matters worse, if the new department were to have any chance of success it was essential that is maintained a strong voice in the decision-making process of the British government and at the earliest possible stage. Only then could it keep policy-makers informed of any difficulties that it believed their proposed approach might create. Instead, the DO found itself often faced by a certain degree of distrust and even disdain from within Whitehall, with the commonly made complaint that it was 'much too inclined to take the extreme Dominion, as opposed to the Imperial, point of view'.[14] Hostility such as this made it hard for the department to secure any real measure of influence at the critical stages of policy formulation. Certainly in its early years even some of those who were generally supportive could see the new office as no more than 'a quasi-diplomatic machine', to be short-circuited on urgent occasions.[15] Faced by growing Dominion requests for information from London, the DO almost inevitably therefore tried to achieve a compromise between those parties concerned. But 'where

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[12] The term 'Commonwealth of Nations' was first used in a speech made by Lord Roseberry in 1884; it was not officially used until 1921 when it featured in the Irish Treaty

[13] Joe Garner, *The Commonwealth Office, 1925-68* (London: 1978), p.26

[14] (*All footnotes are taken from the Public Record Office, Kew unless otherwise stated)
Hubert Montgomery to Foreign Secretary, 23 July 1926, FO372/2216

[15] H.V.Hodson, 'British Foreign Policy and the Dominions', Foreign Affairs, Volume 17 (July 1939), pp.762-763

differences could not be reconciled, the Office was in danger of being caught between two fires, exposed to complaints from each side that its case was not being sufficiently pressed'.[16]

The often apparently complicated national characteristics displayed by the different Dominions only served to exacerbate the difficulties facing the DO. This problem was fully demonstrated by Canada who, with its proximity to the North American continent, increasingly held the view that the United States had become more important to it than Britain.[17] Added to this was the fact that by 1939 over one-third of the population were French-speaking, the vast majority of these living in Quebec. Although liberal opinion in the country as a whole was generally internationalist in outlook, this province tended to be far more isolationist, saving its energies for promoting the idea of the Canadian nation. This meant that in terms of the Dominion idea there was scant support within the province. It was perhaps not really surprising therefore that during the 1930s wide schisms developed between the English- and French-speaking populations, especially over foreign affairs. To reconcile the French-dominated province and maintain a sense of national unity, successive Canadian leaders chose to keep consultation with Britain and the other members of the Commonwealth of Nations on an informal level. And such an approach obviously made the DO's task more difficult.

The situation in the Union of South Africa, which had been created only following a protracted and often bitter conflict between Britain and the Boers, showed considerable similarities. In the first instance, from a total population of just over 11 million people, less than one quarter were of European origin.[18] Of these some 60 percent were Afrikaans-speaking against 40 percent English-speaking. But in proportion to numbers the latter played a comparatively small part in politics, their interests instead lying predominantly in the domination of industry and commerce.[19] This meant that many of

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[16] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.26

[17] See C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict, 1921-48* (Toronto: 1983) p.117

[18] The relationship between the DO and the coloured population within the Union of South Africa was often complicated by the idea that 'it was basic to the political rhetoric of southern Africa that it was a "white man's country"'. See Martin Chanock, *Unconsummated Union: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1900-1945* (London: 1977) p.13

[19] '...the tradition of leaving politics to the politicians (who are mainly Dutch) is so ingrained in South Africa that the average Englishman out there is quite content to cheer General Smuts, without

the key figures dealing with Whitehall were men with distinctly Anglophobe outlooks amongst whom there was considerable opposition not just to the Dominion idea but to the British Empire as a whole. Generals Hertzog and Smuts, the old Boer war colleagues, existed in an often uneasy coalition, the United Party overseeing a country which reflected the government, a sometimes unstable collection of peoples differing in language, religion and outlook.[20] Even those individuals who were committed supporters of Britain, most notably Smuts, had deep reservations about the best stance for the Union to adopt in the event of another war in Europe.[21]

Australia's approach to its relationship with London differed considerably from that adopted by both Canada and the Union as its connections with, and indeed dependence, on Britain was far more pronounced. With its 'White Australia' policy actively discouraging the immigration of non-British Europeans, by 1939 nearly 90 percent of the country's population came from the British Isles. Although the government in Canberra remained proud of the autonomy attached to its Dominion status, during the inter-war years there was a lack of interest in foreign affairs and a general willingness to defer to British policy. The only noticeable exception to this rule was the situation in the Far East. In neighbouring New Zealand, held by many within Whitehall to be 'the dutiful Dominion', there was an even greater sense of commitment to the Imperial idea.[22] Without representation in foreign capitals and happy to rely on the Governor-General in Wellington for communication with the British government, it would not be until 1947 that the country's parliament finally enacted the Statute of Westminster. It however maintained a pronouncedly different interpretation of international affairs from Britain and after 1935 a broadly socialist Labour government held power in Wellington. Nonetheless it continued to be the most firmly supportive of the idea that the Dominions should automatically participate in any war in which Britain was involved.

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watching what he is doing, and was, even at one time, anxious to get on with General Hertzog'; see 'South Africa: The British', That National Review, Number 116 (January 1941), pp.23-24

[20] See W.K.Hancock, *Smuts, The Fields of Force, 1919-1950* (London: 1968) pp.318-325; C.M.Van der Heever, *General J.B.M.Hertzog* (Johannesburg: 1946) pp.278-283

[21] See W.H.Clark, 'Race Relations and Political Trends in the Union of South Africa, 1935-1940', April 1940, Clark Papers (University of Cape Town)

[22] See Angus Ross, 'Reluctant Dominion or Dutiful Daughter? New Zealand and the Commonwealth in the Inter-war Years', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Volume X (1972), pp.28-44

It is clear therefore that, for the DO, the inter-war environment it faced was a complicated one. Indeed this was especially the case with the questionable enthusiasm for its mission amongst those who surrounded it. In light of this it seems hard to disagree with those who have wondered how the department was able to function at all, prior to 1939, other than in 'mounting salvage operations to limit the harm caused by differences between the Dominions and the British Government'.[23] At the war's outbreak, with a staff of less than one hundred and a ramshackle collection of offices, it faced an enormous challenge to overcome the prejudices of the many that continued to dismiss it as 'a Post Office'.

This did not mean however, as has recently been suggested, that the DO lacked any sense of purpose.[24] With the worsening of the war, the pressure quickly increased on it to protect the relationship with the Dominions. This meant dealing, amongst other things, dealing with a growing collection of politicians, both at home and abroad, whose actions and comments seemed intent on creating a disastrous rift. In this requirement the DO was not to be found wanting and, although it had no previous experience of operating under wartime conditions, with each dispute its own confidence in its abilities appeared to grow. At the same time, as the military situation deteriorated, by chance a Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs was appointed in London who was determined to prevent any collapse. By 1942, when Lord Cranborne was moved from the DO to head the Colonial Office (CO), he left behind him a department which was playing a key role in the Allied war effort, namely the effective maintenance of the Anglo-Dominion alliance.

The department's role and its importance during the early years of the war is undeniably a subject that has been overlooked in most examinations of the British Empire and the Second World War. It has in fact been common for many imperial historians of the period to have entirely failed even to acknowledge the DO's existence.[25] Others, in

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[23] John O'Brien, 'Conditional Loyalties: Australia, Ireland and the Decline of the Dominions Office', Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Paper (1990), p.2

[24] See Ronald Hyam, 'The British Empire in the Edwardian Era' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, p.256

[25] For example James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets* (London: 1978); Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983* (London: 1975); David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled* (London: 1991); P.J.Cain & A.G.Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction,*

mentioning its activities, have done so only in referring to Britain's waning power or when dealing with specific incidents which produced clashes between key individuals.[26] An exclusive focus on the military achievements of the combined Imperial forces, which ultimately proved instrumental in helping secure victory on all fronts, have provided others with their subject matter.[27] Where the DO does secure a mention it is most often in the form of, at most, a few pages but, in some cases, it merits no more than a mere footnote.[28]

The exceptions to this general rule are rare. Unquestionably the most important of these is the autobiography written some twenty-five years ago by Joe Garner.[29] Baron Garner of Chiddingly was the only civil servant to publish an account of his experiences in the department. This began in the DO where he started the war as a principal and continued through to recount his experiences in the department's successors, the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Commonwealth Office where he finished his career as Permanent Under Secretary.[30] As he himself recalls, when he was first assigned to the department in October 1930, it was a part of Whitehall 'of whose existence up till (sic) that time I had been sublimely ignorant'. Undoubtedly the best published source of information about the DO's operational machinery and the people who manned it, there is a wealth of anecdotes and personal detail about his time in what he, and those around him, affectionately called 'the Office'. Less than five percent of the text is devoted to the wartime period, however, and much of that deals

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1914-90 (London: 1993)

[26] See Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*; John Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (London: 1982); Colin Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire* (London: 1968); David Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War* (New York: 1988); David Day, *The Great Betrayal, Britain, Australia and the Onset of the Pacific War 1939-42* (Melbourne: 1988)

[27] For example Glen St.J.Barclay, *The Empire is Marching* (London: 1976); William Elliot and H.Duncan Hall (eds.), *The British Commonwealth at War* (New York: 1943); F.W.Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies, Manpower and Organisation in Two World Wars* (Manchester: 1988)

[28] For example J.D.B.Miller, *Britain and the Old Dominions* (London: 1966); W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origin and Impact* (Minneapolis: 1977); Paul Knaplund, *Britain, Commonwealth and Empire, 1901-1955* (London: 1956); Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience* (London: 1996)

[29] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*

[30] One of Garner's colleagues did produce an unpublished memoir for which Batterbee wrote a foreward; *The Memoirs of Sir Charles Dixon*, Batterbee Papers (Rhodes House Library) Box 20/5

with events post-1942 and the expansion of the war. At the same time, although there is reference to primary documentation, greatest emphasis is placed on Garner's personal recollection and mistakes sometimes occur when describing the precise details surrounding certain events. Nonetheless *The Commonwealth Office* offers an excellent perspective of wartime DO operations.

Aside from the above account, every other contemporary autobiography broadly relates to the workings of the CO, a much larger and older department that enjoys a far more comprehensive level of coverage. Although its focus lies with the CO's role and function, the two volumes produced by Sir Charles Jeffries do however make useful references to events within the DO.[31] Sir Cosmo Parkinson, who frequently moved between both departments during the early war period, also produced a slim volume offering some interesting descriptions of the prevailing atmosphere.[32] *Whitehall and the Commonwealth*, written thirty-five years ago by John Cross, is useful in terms of tracing the DO's evolution but again treats the Second World War as something of a footnote.[33]

Robert Holland's *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance* remains perhaps the key study of Anglo-Dominion relations during the inter-war period. With his extensive reference to the primary source material then available, he concentrates on the economic relationship between the different governments. Holland also illustrates the degree to which, from the Locarno Treaties onwards, Britain and the Dominions no longer shared a common approach towards international questions. Although generally sympathetic towards its achievements with only limited resources and support, he concludes that the DO 'never developed the political muscle to affect British policy-making generally...and had perforce to concentrate on tactics rather than strategy'.[34] The other study of note in this regard is Ritchie Ovendale's, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World* in which the emphasis is placed on the Dominion's role in the years

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[31] Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Empire and its Civil Service* (Cambridge: 1938); Sir Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Office* (London: 1956)

[32] Cosmo Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within* (London: 1947)

[33] John Cross, *Whitehall and the Commonwealth: British Departmental Organisation for Commonwealth Relations, 1900-1966* (London: 1967)

[34] Robert Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance, 1918-1939* (London: 1981) p.172

immediately prior to September 1939 and the outbreak of war.[35]

Of course, no study such as this could be attempted without a thorough examination of the various relevant volumes produced by Nicholas Mansergh.[36] Having briefly served in the wartime DO, as Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth at Cambridge University he went on to become one of the dominant forces in the study of imperial history. Once again however, although there is considerable discussion about 'Dominion status', the workings of the DO appear as little more than a page of explanation in which the department's role is portrayed as the movement of information between the various Dominion capitals. He does however recognise that those individuals staffing the DO needed to be able to do more than act simply as administrators, the essential criteria required for working in the CO, they also needed to be diplomats.

With so little published material, this study has been dependent on the information contained within the DO's own files and especially the DO35 class of 'General Correspondence'. Although the Public Record Office holds in excess of 40,000 DO files, nearly half of which are in the DO35 class, it seems clear that following the passage of the Public Records Act in 1958 a widespread destruction of documents took place. A number of those that remain carry hand-written comments stating that they had been deemed to be of historical value and were thus saved. Despite the suggestions of some Dominion historians that there was a deliberate pattern intended to hide a variety of alleged intrigues, no evidence has emerged to support such claims.[37] Whilst a 1941 defence regulation allowed for the early destruction of sensitive documents, what instead seems to have happened is that owing to constraints of time and space the procedures for reviewing records allowed the individuals involved a great

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[35] Ritchie Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World* (Cardiff: 1975)

[36] Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and Nations* (London: 1948); Nicholas Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931-39* (London: 1952); Nicholas Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Wartime Co-operation and Post-War Change, 1939-1952* (Oxford: 1958); Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience* (London: 1969)

[37] E.M.Andrews, *The British Commonwealth and Aggression in the East, 1931-1935* (Sydney: 1987) p.XI

deal of autonomy of action.[38] As a result certain subject areas are well covered with files copied in triplicate, in others there is virtually no saved material.

Indeed whatever the exact reason behind the gaps which now exist in the records, in some categories and for certain years there are considerable omissions. Although it is impossible to say with any real degree of accuracy just how many files were destroyed, an examination of the DO3 hand-written indexes to the DO35 class would place the figure in excess of 50 percent. It should be remembered that many of these could have been of little or no historical value, whilst some were undoubtedly copies which have been saved elsewhere. It should also be noted that this study has been greatly aided by the opening of hitherto closed DO files, such as the papers of Sir Eric Machtig, a key figure in the wartime department. Nonetheless it has been necessary to undertake an exhaustive survey of other primary sources in an attempt to circumvent the deficiencies. Official Foreign Office and Cabinet records held in London along with a wide variety of overseas archives, especially the Public Archive of Canada in Ottawa, have proven invaluable; the latter contains extensive microfilm copies of the DO35 class taken from the originals in London. Personal archives throughout the UK and abroad have also contained copies of missing official documents along with diaries and letters that have provided an excellent source of information. Together these have allowed for a comprehensive reconstruction of events.

Although they both achieved Dominion status, this study makes no specific reference to either Newfoundland or the Irish Free State. The former, Britain's oldest colony, was badly hit by the global economic Depression and the fall in international fish prices, and in 1933 the government was unable to pay the interest charges on its national debt. Subsequently it continued within the DO's remit but in place of responsible government it was instead administered by a 'Commission of Government', appointed by a Royal Commission and consisting of a mixture of British and Newfoundland civil servants, technically making it no longer a Dominion.[39]

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[38] See Anne Thurston, *Records of the Colonial Office, Dominions Office, Commonwealth Relations Office and Commonwealth Office* (London: 1995) pp.57-59, 63-67

[39] See Empire Information Service, *Origins and Purpose: A Handbook on the British Commonwealth and Empire* (London: 1946) pp.66-68

The DO's wartime relationship with the Irish Free State is a much more complicated issue, one surely meriting its own dedicated study. In December 1936, the Irish government had passed the External Affairs Act and, thus, only recognised the British monarch for certain limited purposes in external affairs. The following year a referendum accepted the proposal of a new constitution and, in July 1937, a new country came into existence. With the creation of Eire, the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, which had given the Irish Free State the same position in the Commonwealth as the other Dominions, ceased to have any real meaning. The Governor-General was replaced with a President elected by national suffrage whilst the British High Commissioner in Dublin's title also changed. Nevertheless Britain and the other Dominions continued to regard Eire as a member of the Commonwealth and its constitution as that of a Dominion. However the Government of Eire, headed by Eamon de Valera, neither acknowledged any allegiance to the Crown nor would it accept the Dominion conception of the unity of the Commonwealth.[40] A number of contemporary observers pointed to the decision to remain neutral in September 1939 as the most conclusive evidence that Dominion status equated fully with independent status. But in terms of its dealings with the DO, this caused numerous complications and a wartime relationship entirely different from that existing with the other Dominions. In light of the recent opening of numerous documents at the Public Record Office, this area is now ripe for detailed examination.

In terms of structure, following a description of its evolution and operation, this study has chosen as its starting point the uncertainty which surrounded the outbreak of the Second World War and whether the Dominions would again side with Britain as they had done twenty-five years before. Proceeding forward from September 1939 it examines various episodes and incidents in a loosely chronological manner, in each case highlighting the efforts made by the DO to defend the Anglo-Dominion relationship. Its skills at crisis management reached their zenith following the Japanese attack in the Far East in December 1941 as the department attempted to prevent what seemed a potentially devastating rupture in Anglo-Australian relations. The eventual re-shuffle of the British War Cabinet shortly after the February 1942 surrender of the Imperial forces

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[40] See Dierdre McMahon, 'Ireland and the Empire-Commonwealth, 1900-1948' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, pp.155-158; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy*, pp.270-328

in Singapore is taken as the end point. With the war rapidly widening, this point represents the beginning of a new relationship for the British Commonwealth of Nations as the role of the United States quickly grew and the Dominions looked increasingly towards Washington and not London for guidance.

CHAPTER ONE

The Dominions Office: Origins, Formation and Pre-War Development

The Evolution of a Dominions Office

In the Seventeenth century, concerted attempts began to develop some form of organization through which Great Britain could administer effectively its expanding Empire.[1] The first step taken in July 1660, the year of the Restoration, was the establishment of a Committee of the Privy Council, the role of which would be to deal with the colonies. Initially it was referred to as the 'Council of Foreign Plantations' and was for the most part composed of Members of Parliament. But within twelve years it had expanded and, as the 'Council of Trade and Plantations', its regular meetings were attracting the attention of King Charles II. This combining together of trade and colonial affairs lasted, with short temporary interruptions, for more than a century during which time the Council remained London's principal method of governing its overseas possessions.[2]

In 1768 a Secretary of State was appointed to head the now renamed 'American or Colonial Department', the Earl of Hillsborough being the first tasked with handling the Sovereign's Affairs. This arrangement only lasted for fourteen years when it was abolished following the loss of the American colonies. During the final two years, a 'Council of Trade' was revived but it had little real authority on colonial questions. In 1794 'Colonial Office' became an accepted term following Henry Dundas's appointment as Secretary for War with nominal responsibility for the Colonies. This arrangement was also relatively short-lived as, in 1801, the colonies were included within the expanded remit of the renamed Secretary of State for War. From 1815 onwards and the end of the long-running Napoleonic Wars, the Secretary for War and the Colonies, as he was now termed, became increasingly concerned with the latter alone.

By 1854 military affairs had been removed to a newly created War Office while the Colonial Office (CO) was formerly constituted as a separate and independent Department of State. In the first instance it was presided over by a new Secretary of

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[1] See Sir George Fiddes, *The Dominions and Colonial Offices* (London: 1926) pp.264-277; Jeffries, *The Colonial Empire and its Civil Service*, pp. 206-210; Jeffries, *The Colonial Office*, pp.13-26; *The Commonwealth Office Year Book, 1967* (London: 1967) pp.5-7; 'FCO and its buildings: a chronology', a document prepared by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London (1999)

[2] 'Draft notes of a lecture given by Sir John Shuckburgh at Oxford University', July 1937, CO886/32

State for Colonies, the Rt. Hon. Sir George Grey, formerly the Home Secretary. The new office was initially divided into four geographical divisions, with general business being entrusted to the chief clerk. In 1869 an Accounts Branch was set up, while the following year a General Department assumed some of the chief clerk's work.

The first key stage in the creation of an independent Dominions Office (DO) was a 'Colonial Conference' held in London in 1907 that was attended by delegates from all of the self-governing colonies.[3] The fourth conference of its kind to be convened in twenty years, it was presided over by the prime minister of the day, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. This was the first occasion that Britain's senior Minister had taken the chair. Held against a background of growing calls, some of them deemed to be quite controversial, for some attempt to be made to rationalise the relationship between Britain and the self-governing colonies, a number of far-reaching points were agreed.[4]

There was an acceptance that subsequent meetings of this nature would take place every four years and be referred to as 'Imperial Conferences'; the idea of the establishment of some form of 'Imperial Council' was however roundly dismissed. An informal acknowledgment was also agreed that the term 'Dominion' should be adopted to differentiate the then self-governing communities of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Union of South Africa and Newfoundland from the dependent crown colonies. The Confederation of Canada had been created in 1867 with the formal title of 'Dominion of Canada' and it was successfully argued by representatives from Ottawa that the same description should apply for all of the other self-governing colonies.

Of perhaps greater significance though, in terms of the development of the relationship between the Great Britain and the now newly recognised Dominions, was a pledge made during the conference by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Elgin. Given largely in deference to calls from the overseas politicians present and phrased in very general terms, the British government announced its intention to create a department to deal

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[3] Overseas Information Leaflet (Number 31), 'The Dominions Office', PRO; ibid, 'Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference', 1907, Cd.3523; 'Papers laid before the Colonial Conference', 1907, Cd.3524

[4] See W.K.Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, Volume I, Problems of Nationality 1918-1936* (London: 1937) pp.46-47; Judd, *Empire*, pp.220-221

exclusively with the Dominions. Much of the impetus for this move came from the knowledge that many Dominions' statesmen had grown to dislike having to deal with the CO. Typical of this was Alfred Deakin, Australia's second prime minister, who believed the department to have

> ...a certain impenetrability, a certain remoteness, a certain weariness of people much pressed with affairs and greatly overburdened, whose natural desire is to say "kindly postpone this; do not press this; do not trouble us; what does it matter? We have enough to do already"?[5]

With such complaints in mind, at the beginning of December 1907 a re-organisation of the CO was undertaken.[6] Three departments or divisions were created, one of which was to be solely responsible for administering the relationship with the Dominions.[7]

Despite this change, calls continued, both at home and abroad, for further reforms to be carried out. First raised during the 1911 Imperial Conference, amongst the most far-reaching of these was the suggestion of a complete re-allocation of ministerial responsibilities and the creation of an entirely separate Dominions' department.[8] There was scant support for such proposals within Whitehall, although during the years immediately prior to August 1914 and the outbreak of hostilities with the Central Powers a mounting sense of interest in the Dominions did develop. This saw something of a challenge to the CO's authority emerge from both the Foreign Office (FO) and the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID). Created in 1904, the latter was a purely advisory body headed by the British prime minister, its role being 'to investigate, report [and] recommend' on matters which affected the Empire.[9]

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[5] Quoted in 'Whitehall and the Commonwealth: The Distribution of Department Responsibility', Round Table, Volume 45 (1954/1955), p.234

[6] 'Lord Elgin's Despatch on CO Reorganization', September 1907, Cd.3795, PRO

[7] Cross, *Whitehall and the Commonwealth*, pp.14-16; Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance*, pp.40-45

[8] See Frederick Madden & John Darwin (eds.), *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth, Volume VI, The Dominions and India since 1900* (London: 1993) pp.16-26; I.R.Hancock, 'The 1911 Imperial Conference', Historical Studies, Volume 12, Number 47 (October 1966), pp.156-172

[9] See Cecil Hurst (et al.), *Great Britain and the Dominions* (Illinois: 1928) pp.39-41

Whilst the experiences of the First War World highlighted the continued need for change within the Anglo-Dominion relationship, both the Asquith and Lloyd George governments steadfastly rejected the need for a separate administrative body. Even the more modest suggestion that the title of the Colonial Secretary might be altered to encompass a reference to the Dominions was roundly dismissed. Such intransigence helped ensure that, by the war's end, the CO appeared to have once more asserted its dominance over the various Imperial branches. When changes finally came during the inter-war years, Leopold Amery was the man who deserves much of the credit for the radical re-organisation, although he did have some support, notably from the South African Jan Smuts.[10]

One of the most significant catalysts was the inability or unwillingness of successive post-war governments in London to consult the Dominions over vital foreign policy decisions.[11] This had caused mounting tensions, most notably in 1922 during the dispute between the British and Turkish governments known as the Chanak crisis.[12] The disagreements which this caused were not the only source of complaint; Ramsay MacDonald's first Labour government recognition of the Soviet Union in 1924, without any prior discussion with the Dominions, caused great upset. But with the announcement in November of the same year that Amery was to become Colonial Secretary in the new Conservative government, change would not be long in coming. In accepting the position Amery had stipulated to the prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, that he 'should be allowed to create a new and entirely separate office to deal with the Dominions'. The new Secretary of State had long been a critic, amongst other things, of the CO's continuing responsibility for Dominion affairs. His argument in fact called for London to make it far more apparent that it held its dealing with the Dominion

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[10] See Wm. Roger Louis, *'In the Name of God Go!' Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill* (London: 1992) pp.75-89; H.Duncan Hall, 'The Genesis of the Balfour Declaration of 1926', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Volume 1 (1961-1963), pp.173-77; Colin Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire, 1918-68* (London: 1968) pp.172-73; Sir Keith Hancock, 'Empire, Commonwealth, Cosmos and His Own Place: The Smutsian Philosophy', Round Table, Volume 60 (1970), pp.444-445

[11] See Philip Wigley, 'Whitehall and the 1923 Imperial Conference', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume 1 (1972-1973), pp.223-236

[12] See David Walder, *The Chanak Affair* (London: 1969) pp.215-216, 229-230, 353; Mark Arnold-Forster, 'Chanak Rocks the Empire: The Anger of Billy Hughes', Round Table, Volume 58 (1968), pp.169-177

governments to be 'wholly different in character from the administration of the dependent Empire', going so far as to call for relation to be placed on an equal level.[13]

A series of lengthy post-war memorandums ultimately produced, at the beginning of 1925, a document outlining his proposals to form 'the Dominions and Colonial Offices'.[14] Contained within was a summary of significant events that had occurred since the 1907 conference. There then followed a lucid argument placing considerable emphasis on the heavily increased workload within the Dominions' Division and the changes this should precipitate. As far as Amery was concerned the essential point to be borne in mind was that

> ...the Dominion and Colonial work are essentially different in character, as different as the work of the Foreign Office from that of the Admiralty. The Dominions work is entirely political and diplomatic. The Colonial work is administrative and directive. The one calls for great insight and infinite tact. The other for initiative and drive.

However, it was not until the middle of June 1925, eight months after he had first been appointed, that the 'sudden' announcement was made to the House of Commons of the establishment of a separate DO.

Much of the delay had been caused by the debate taking place within Westminster which followed the release of the Scott Committee's report. This panel, comprising three members of the Treasury, had looked into the financial implications associated with the establishment of a new department.[15] The determination of the Exchequer, and in particular its Permanent Secretary Sir Warren Fisher, to keep expenditure on the formation of the new department to a bare minimum nearly proved insurmountable.[16] The argument put forward by Treasury Chambers was that a separate department was merely duplicating existing duties and so adding to costs. In defending the necessity

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[13] L.S.Amery, *My Political Life: Volume II, War and Peace 1914-1929* (London: 1953) p.335

[14] Memorandum prepared by Amery, 'The Dominions and Colonial Offices - Proposals for Reorganisation', 20 February 1925, DO121/1 (see Appendix One)

[15] 'Report by R.R.Scott, H.P.Hamilton and R.V.Nind-Hopkins to Baldwin', 20 February 1925, DO121/1 (see Appendix Two)

[16] See John Rimington, 'Sir Warren Fisher's Civil Service', The Source Public Management Journal (19 January 2000)

for change however, both Amery and the prime minister were quick to point to the differences in the nature of the departmental work involved in Dominion relations, on the one hand, and colonial administration on the other.[17]

The Colonial Secretary's cause was helped, not just by the strong backing he enjoyed from Baldwin, but also the high profile he had established for himself in the public eye.[18] But it was Amery's sheer determination to see Dominion affairs separately managed which in many ways ultimately enabled him to overcome the many obstacles he faced. Such was his passion that he even managed to persuade at least some of his opponents to soften their hostility towards the 'Foreign Office with a family feeling'.[19] It would still take another five years though before his desire for a truly separate ministry responsible for the Dominions would be fully realised.

The DO's Early Development

From the date of its establishment in June 1925 the new department operated out of the 'Government Offices, Whitehall, North Block', a building of five floors, one below ground level, located at the corner of Whitehall and Downing Street.[20] Known affectionately by those who worked within it as 'the Office', the DO remained here for the whole of its short existence. The building had originally been erected between 1862 and 1875, the famous architect Sir George Gilbert Scott presiding over a controversial project which suffered repeated delays from the interventions of the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston. During the thirteen year construction period, the CO's staff petitioned their Secretary of State on the unsatisfactory conditions in which they found themselves required to work. At this time the greatest complaint was that 'the sky was visible through a large hole in the roof with rain and snow running down

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[17] Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952,* pp.398-401; Garner, *The Commonwealth Office* , pp.10-12

[18] For example Amery to General Sir C.Ferguson, 19 March 1925, DO121/1; ibid., Amery to Bruce and Massey, 19 March 1925; see Louis, *'In the Name of God Go!'*, pp.88-89

[19] Sir Walter Runciman quoted in Gerald Palmer, *Consultation and Co-operation in the British Commonwealth* (London: 1934) p.24

[20] Memorandum prepared by Robinson (CO),12 May 1937, CO886/32

into one room'.[21] But despite expenditure on the interior being kept to a bare minimum, a report prepared just before the outbreak of the Second World War nevertheless proved quite complimentary about the building's structure and its well-built, thick, solid walls and high ceilings.[22]

In order that a self-contained area might be found for its new, junior colleague, the CO was reorganised. Although Amery thought it would not create 'the slightest difficulty or possibility of friction', for many years to come some of those moved would 'look with envious eyes at the comparatively few rooms [the DO] occupied'.[23] Indeed, in what was described by the first Secretary of State as 'a purely housekeeping matter', the DO took rooms in the basement, ground and first floors on the Whitehall front of the building. The majority of the department's staff were however actually located in a cluster of rooms on the ground and first floors.[24] Some of these overlooked Whitehall and the Cenotaph, the remainder the prime minister's residence at No.10 Downing Street.[25] Above these rooms there was the library and below the Telegraph Section, both of which were common to the two departments.

The usual entrance for DO staff was through a small doorway in Downing Street, although there was a more imposing doorway from the inner quadrangle leading to a pillared hall on the ground floor. From this a massive spiral staircase went as far as the second floor.[26] In the first floor corridor a partition was erected, largely for the benefit of outsiders, although it was said to be difficult to point to an actual boundary between the two departments.[27] As for the room for the Secretary of State of Dominion Affairs, on the Whitehall front, it was said to 'lack the splendour of the Colonial Secretary's room and was apt to be noisy'.

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[21] Memorandum prepared on the Building of the Colonial Office by Sir Frank Baines, Office of Works, 9 October 1925, CO886/32

[22] Memorandum prepared by Ministry of Works, January 1938, DO35/548D

[23] Amery to Baldwin, 23 May 1925, DO121/1

[24] Ibid., Amery to Baldwin, 23 May 1925 (see Appendix Three)

[25] See Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within,* pp.12-13; Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.15-16; *'The Buildings of the FCO'*, http://193.114.50.10/directory/dynpage.asp?Page=61

[26] Jeffries, *The Colonial Empire and its Civil Service*, p.208

[27] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.15

Conditions in this setting were often difficult as space was at a premium and the enforced under-spending that had taken place during the original construction in the 1860s meant there were few luxuries. During the early years the main room used by the department's clerks was

> ...uncomfortably full with its present staff, especially in the winter. Only the part near the windows is adequately lighted while the hot water system, the temperature of which cannot be controlled, renders that part of the room almost unbearably stuffy.[28]

By 1941 the situation had become so bad that the lighting in the telegraph section was deemed as being responsible for the poor eyesight of those who were obliged to work there.[29] The amount of free space had also not improved, it being recorded in the same year that eight clerks had a space of only four hundred square feet in which to work, not allowing for filing cabinets and volumes of letters and cables.[30]

Despite opposition from their own Secretary of State, two years previously some of the CO's more senior members had proposed major changes, more for the benefit of their colleagues than those within their sister Office.[31] The suggestion was put forward that two of the DO's internal sections should move from North Block to Parliament Square House, three minutes' walk away, leaving just nine thousand square feet within the Whitehall offices in which to accommodate the department's remaining ninety-five staff. The Ministry of Works was opposed to the idea however as it intended to move the DO into refurbished offices in Whitehall Gardens. These would not be ready for occupation though until 1943 at the earliest.[32] Although the proposal was strongly rejected by the DO's senior officers and even a growing number of CO staff, the then Secretary of State of the former surprisingly offered little comment other than to signal his agreement.[33] But the war intervened and it was not until mid-1940 that two

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[28] Minute by R.Hamblin, 10 April 1929, DO35/73

[29] Minute by Costley-White, 5 August 1941, DO35/548D

[30] Minute by Howard, 26 September 1941, CO886/24

[31] Ibid., minute by MacDonald, July 1939

[32] Ibid., First Commissioner of Works to MacDonald, 10 July 1939

sections, D and E, were finally moved on, for 'safety reasons', to a building in Park Street, Mayfair. There they remained, later being joined by the CO's Economics and Social Services Department.

Only shortly before this re-organisation was completed, a memorandum had been approved within Whitehall entitled 'Maintenance of Government Machinery in a Special Emergency'. This was intended to assist in the event of government being reduced to the barest minimum following an attempted German invasion. As far as the DO were concerned, it called for thirty-two of their staff to work, eat and sleep in five protected rooms of the North Block basement.[34] Lists of those personnel who would be affected were kept up-to-date until 1943, but the plan was never fully implemented. Nonetheless DO staff continued regularly not just to work but also to live within the building.

In the summer of 1941 it was once again proposed that further changes should be made to the organisation of the offices at North Block. On this occasion however it was not the CO but the Air Ministry seeking greater space. The DO again resisted these proposals falling back on the argument first advanced two years before. This was that the existing site offered 'special advantage...particularly in the case of crisis when it is necessary to maintain contact at all hours of the day and night with the Foreign Office and with No.10'.[35] After considerable discussion, some of which appears to have been quite heated, it was agreed to maintain the existing arrangements and the bulk of the DO remained based in and around North Block for the duration of the war.[36] The only exception was 'the sphere of Tait-Ewbank-Wiseman-Macleod', a small group who carried out practically all of the pre-war duties at the

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[33] Minute by Stephenson, 9 February 1939, CO886/23; minute by Howard (CO), 25 May 1939, CO886/24; Duff (Office of Works) to Jeffries (CO), 28 August 1939, DO35/548/30; ibid., Jeffries to Duff, 11 September 1939

[34] Memorandum 'Maintenance of Government Machinery in a Special Emergency', February 1940, CO886/37

[35] Minute by Stephenson, 9 February 1939, CO886/23

[36] Memorandum prepared by Stephenson, 25 August 1941, DO35/548D; minute by Stephenson, 27 August 1941, DO35/548/30; Sub-committee Report on Accommodation, 26 August 1941, DO35/548D; minute by Dixon, 20 September 1941, DO35/548/30; J.M.Lee & Martin Petter, *The Colonial Office, War and Development Policy* (London: 1982) p.32

corner of Park Street and Park Square 'where they might as well have been a separate department'.[37]

The close relationship with the CO meant that the DO's creation did not involve any really fundamental change in the crucial area of administrative organisation.[38] For several years the department shared, not only, its Secretary of State with its older colleague - between 1925 and 1930, and for short periods in 1931 and 1938-39 - but also the same building, the same registry, legal staff, library, accounts and even printing. There was even a common cafeteria and bar. The enforced bonds between the departments did however lead to certain difficulties, particularly in terms of promoting any individual sense of character. This subsequently led one senior CO officer to compare the DO to 'a wayward child...which perhaps suffered...from an inferiority complex'.[39] With what was clearly felt in certain quarters to be a somewhat distorted identity, the Office therefore needed staff of the highest quality.[40]

Following the Labour Party's success in the 1929 General Election, Amery was replaced by Lord Passfield. As the renowned social reformer Sidney Webb, he had begun his political career within the CO. He took charge for the 1930 Imperial Conference at which, according to one of its attendees, it was clear that 'the Dominions Office was practically made a Foreign Office dealing with international matters within the Empire'.[41] But aged seventy at the time of his appointment, the Secretary of State left little real mark on the DO and headed the still-united departments for just twelve months.

His successor, Jimmy Thomas, had the distinction of becoming the first Minister to hold the individual post of Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. Now headed by a Labour minister, the Treasury, which had been so obstructionist about the funding for the new department five years before, on this occasion amended its earlier objections

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[37] Shannon to Batterbee, 2 July 1941, Batterbee Papers

[38] *Commonwealth Relations Office Handbook, 1952* (London: 1951) p.7

[39] See Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within*, pp.96-97

[40] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.15-24, 25-32, 137-148, 159-175

[41] Sir Fabian Ware quoted in W.J.Harte, *The Control of Foreign Policy in the British Commonwealth of Nations* (London: 1932) p.29

to the change. As Lord Privy Seal, Thomas had struggled unsuccessfully with the huge growth in unemployment brought about by the Depression and his move to the DO was clearly seen as a demotion by many of his Cabinet colleagues. Nonetheless he tackled his new role with great vigour, announcing upon his arrival that he had been sent to the Office 'to see that there's no mucking about with the British Empire'. His distinctive approach however proved to be something of a challenge for his new colleagues although, with time, the relationship did improve.[42] An example can be found in the comment of a senior DO official whose task was to 'mind' the Secretary of State during the 1932 Ottawa Conference. He privately recorded that, although initially 'he would not keep his mouth shut', Thomas' final contribution to proceedings was 'an admirable speech in which he said nothing very nicely'.[43]

In 1935, at the age of just thirty-three, Malcolm MacDonald, the son of Ramsay, was appointed to head the department, his first Cabinet post. Despite his relative youth and the Office's short existence, the new Secretary of State already had a good knowledge of his charge, having previously served first as Parliamentary Private Secretary and then Parliamentary Under-Secretary to Thomas. He seems to have been well regarded by many of those in the DO with whom he worked on a daily basis, and the first since Amery to have inspired any real measure of confidence. But within a matter of years assessments of MacDonald's abilities would not be so flattering, a number of those who later worked with him complaining of his 'less than inspiring character' and an 'ability to do the minimum amount possible'.[44] He nonetheless appears to have led the department well until January 1939, the last six months in an acting capacity after Lord Stanley, who had been appointed as Dominions Secretary in May 1938, unexpectedly died shortly afterwards.

The final pre-war Secretary of State, Thomas Inskip, cannot claim to have shared MacDonald's general appeal. This despite the fact that, as the Solicitor General in

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[42] James L.Sturgis, 'What's in a Name? A Perspective on the Transition of Empire/ Commonwealth, 1918-50', The Round Table, Number 334 (1995), p.197

[43] Whiskard to Harding, 13 August 1932, DO121/61; ibid, Whiskard to Harding, 23 August 1932

[44] Pearson Diary, 12 September 1939, Lester Pearson Papers (National Archives, Ottawa) Vol.1-2, MG26, N8; Diary, 25 September 1939, Hubert Cowell Papers (Rhodes House Library, Oxford) MS.Brit.Emp.s.359

1931 he had passionately defended the Statute of Westminster, describing it as 'a landmark in the constitutional history of the British Empire'.[45]

Opinion was mixed within Whitehall about the calibre of the staff supporting the various Secretaries of State. In such a small department the professionalism of its personnel was of course critical. According to one retired FO official however, reminiscing about attitudes in the department in the late 1930s, the DO and CO 'were regarded almost as lesser breeds without the law'.[46] As Lord Chancellor in 1932, Lord Sankey also maintained that 'the Dominion Office [did] not contain the best brains in the civil service'.[47] Such views apparently persisted, even long after the DO had ceased to exist. But these comments failed to recognise the difficult nature of the task facing the new Office, not least that from the outset it was only very modest in size.

The DO was made up of a Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS), an Assistant Under-Secretary (AUS), three Assistant Secretaries each in charge of a department, four Principals and four Assistant Principals, an administrative total of just thirteen people. With no more than eighteen individuals in the clerical grades, most of them registry clerks, it would have in fact been impossible for the Office to have functioned as a separate body from the CO. The much more senior of the two departments often complained during the early years about the inconvenience caused by its colleague's demands for typists and clerks; the DO did not even have its own Establishment section and relied upon the CO for all 'house-keeping' duties until just before the war.[48] But within the ranks there were some key individuals, who remained in, or near, to the DO throughout its relatively short existence. 'Competent and conscientious rather than brilliant', these figures played an influential role in the infant department's development.

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[45] See A.Berriedale Keith, *Speeches and Documents on the British Dominions, 1918-31* (London: 1932) pp.285-297

[46] Geoffrey McDermott, *The Eden Legacy* (London: 1969) p.36; comments to author by Sir Geofroy Tory, May 2000

[47] Quoted in O'Brien, 'Conditional Loyalties: Australia, Ireland....', p.1

[48] Minute by Fiddian (CO), 24 August 1925, CO866/2

The new post of Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Dominion Affairs saw a rapid turnover, with eight occupants up to 1940 alone. The first, Sir Charles Davis, had headed the CO Dominions' Division and was an old college friend of Amery. He was therefore an obvious selection, but the widely respected individual was forced to retire in 1930 through ill health. During his time in charge he was supported by Sir Edward Harding as AUS and Sir Harry Batterbee, who was appointed to be the department's senior Assistant Secretary. Upon Davis' retirement his 'assistants' were quickly promoted upwards to replace him, Harding becoming the DO's new senior civil servant.

This vicar's son, invariably known from his initials as 'E.J.', Harding was a figure who 'defended unflinchingly the interests of the Office as he understood them'.[49] But at the same time he was someone who had 'no gift for getting on with people', his own private secretary describing him as 'dedicated, efficient but unattractively self-important' and someone who was 'dry, humourless and out of touch with the real world'.[50] Despite his then relatively junior position, the prominent role which he had established for himself whilst preparing the report for the Dominions Royal Commission, released in February 1917, helped mark him for rapid promotion. Indeed the knowledge and experience that he gained during the various overseas visits connected with the Commission ultimately helped him to secure a position in the new DO well above what he might have normally expected.[51] Once the department had been formed, his presence could be seen in all of the most significant events. One colleague went so far as to argue that 'no state servant played a greater part in bringing about' the successful negotiations held during the 1926 Imperial Conference and the later Statute of Westminster.[52] PUS until 1939, he then moved to the Union of South Africa to become the United Kingdom's High Commissioner, a position he held until ill health finally forced his retirement five years later.

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[49] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.21

[50] Comments to author by Sir Geofroy Tory, May 2000

[51] See Stephen Constantine (ed.), *Dominions Diary: the Letters of E.J.Harding, 1913-1916* (Halifax: 1992) pp.13-35

[52] Sir Eric Machtig quoted in E. T.Williams & H.M.Palmer (eds.) *Dictionary of National Biography, 1951-1960* (London: 1971) pp.454-455

His deputy for the duration of his charge in London, his brother-in-law Batterbee also moved in 1939 to become an overseas High Commissioner, the first member of the DO to be sent to New Zealand. Up until that point in his career he had held a variety of positions and carried out a wide range of different roles: he had paid a secret visit to Eire in 1936 to hold discussions with Eamon de Valera, the Irish prime minister; in the same year he was despatched to Newfoundland to resolve that Dominion's financial crisis; at both Imperial Conferences he fulfilled the pivotal role of Deputy Secretary.[53] Almost completely the opposite in character to Harding, the 'White Knight', as he was fondly known, was perhaps the more likeable of the two and he was pleased to go to Wellington as 'official telegrams and dispatches [could] never take the place of personal discussion'. For him being High Commissioner was an opportunity to 'encourage in every way all those means by which we can get to know one another better, to appreciate one another's point of view, to realise one another's aspirations and difficulties'.[54]

Aside from the obvious family connection, the striking point about these two men, the most influential figures in the DO throughout the 1930s, was the common purpose they shared and the mutually supportive approach they pursued. Both had attended the same Oxford college, both had joined the CO directly upon graduating, both had little or no exposure to the reality of the First World War - Harding, who spent much of the war touring the overseas Dominions, served for four months - and both were amongst the first in 1925 to enter the DO. At this stage Harding, then 45 years of age, had already served within the CO for twenty-four years while his brother-in-law, although the same age, had four years less experience.[55] In short they were career civil servants for whom the maintenance of the standards and practices with which they were familiar was an essential parameter of their position. It was their unequivocal support of Amery's vision which was their most important strength, in particular, their shared conviction that the Dominions required separate representation in Whitehall. This was

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[53] Biographical notes, Batterbee Papers (Introductory Sheet)

[54] Speech given by Batterbee to Victoria League Overseas, London, 14 December 1938, Batterbee Papers (Box 15/2)

[55] See *The Colonial and Dominions Office List, Number 79* (London: 1940) pp.15-17

vital during a period when it has been said that the DO existed only because of 'flanking movements [and] the deflection of attacks and the search for compromise'.[56]

As the debate during the mid-1920s had revealed, there were no shortage of those willing to challenge the DO's existence. During the years that followed an obvious priority for the Office therefore was the establishment of sound relationships, wherever possible, with its governmental colleagues in Whitehall. While its inter-departmental relations appeared sound in many cases, there were some that proved more delicate to maintain than others. A common tradition and interests ensured that generally strong bonds were kept with the CO. But in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, a small measure of resentment began to surface at what was seen to be continuing, but now unnecessary, tutelage given by the older of the two. The FO meanwhile was much more problematic, for a variety of reasons, although by-and-large the association between the two functioned in a broadly effective manner at the working level. At the Treasury however there remained many whose original objections could not be overcome and who still viewed the newcomer as an unnecessary drain on government expenditure. Relations with the Board of Trade were also often strained when the subject of Dominion trade, especially with Australia, was at issue.[57]

Despite the opposition that existed, the Office nonetheless continued to develop and by 1938 administrative and other staff numbers had more than doubled. A second AUS post had been created in 1931 and filled by Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, another of the 'old school', who remained in the role until his appointment as High Commissioner to Australia five years later. Eric Machtig - himself later knighted - replaced him, being once again promoted in early 1940 to PUS. As the senior civil servant within the department, this 'man of many parts' would prove one of the key figures in the wartime DO, his influence looming large at every juncture.

There were other individuals whose influence was important. By 1938 aside from the PUS and the two AUS's, there were five Assistant Under-Secretaries each in charge of a department, thirteen Principals, ten Assistant Principals and thirty-eight other staff.

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[56] Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance*, p.45

[57] See John O'Brien, 'Empire v. National Interests in Australian-British Relations During the 1930s', Historical Studies, Volume 22, Number 89 (October 1987), pp.578-580

There were three notable figures amongst the Assistant Under-Secretaries, each of whom would go on to more senior positions within the wartime department. John Stephenson, who had fought with distinction throughout the First World War, was held to be 'essentially an adviser rather than a strong administrator'. Charles Dixon was recognised as the constitutional expert who 'for half a century acted as the guardian and conscience of the Office'. And finally there was Percivale Liesching, another decorated survivor of four years of military service on the Western Front, who ultimately would prove the most successful of the group.[58]

With New Zealand still preferring not to have a British High Commissioner, of the thirteen Principals in 1938 three were serving in the Dominions. This latter group formed what was described as 'the DO's overseas service', acting as United Kingdom High Commissioners in the Dominions. When the Office was set up, the official channel of communication between Britain and the Dominions was from the Dominions' Secretary to the appropriate Governor-General. However at the 1926 Imperial Conference it was agreed that Governor-Generals should no longer be regarded as the agents of the British government and in future communication would be direct.[59] Traditionally having combined the functions of head of state and British 'diplomatic' representative, the Governor-Generals had come to be generally ignored by their respective Dominion governments. This was because they either proved difficult of character or more commonly because they was seen as 'officials appointed by another government for that government's purposes'.[60]

Two fundamental changes were therefore made post-conference. First, in each of the Dominion capitals the Minister for External Affairs replaced the Governor-General as the sender and recipient of messages, though it would not be until 1942 that New Zealand finally chose to make the change. Second, the British Government began the process of appointing High Commissioners in each of the Dominions. The emphasis the DO attached to having its own representation marked another considerable change from the approach the CO Dominions' Division had adopted. Whilst the latter had not seen

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[58] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.54, p.290

[59] See Denis Judd, *Balfour and the British Empire: A Study in Imperial Evolution, 1874-1932* (London: 1968) pp.328-333

[60] Cross, *Whitehall and the Commonwealth*, p.53

any great importance in its staff having a personal knowledge of Dominion conditions, the DO saw it is a vital method of establishing a close, working relationship.

The decision to create such posts also marked another hard-fought victory for Amery, once again in the face of determined FO and Treasury opposition, and in April 1928 Sir William Clark assumed the first appointment in the Canadian capital.[61] Indeed, although the FO had been desperately keen to send its own officials to the Dominions, as it put it, as a method of 'keeping the different Gov'ts (sic) of the Empire in step', there was much opposition within the DO against such a move.[62] This view was held in part because of a desire to see the department develop independently as rapidly as possible. It was also felt that the FO's diplomats had little real understanding about what the still evolving Anglo-Dominion relationship entailed. Even as late as 1938, Batterbee's departure for his new post in Wellington was in part attributed to the 'vital [need] that High Commissionerships should not consistently pass to persons drawn from other Departments or services'.[63]

It was also felt to be essential that these posts should be filled by informed individuals who knew something of the countries to which they were sent. It was also important that they should know something about the personalities within them who were politically important. Despite having been in Wellington for some time, Viscount Galway, the Governor General in New Zealand, still knew so little about his Dominion that when the prime minister died in early 1940, he sent a telegram of condolence to his widow not realising that he had actually been a bachelor.[64] Exceptions drawn from outside of the DO were therefore rare, Sir Gerald Campbell in Ottawa being the obvious one. Not until the wartime years, when British High Commissioners occasionally were selected from the ranks of Westminster politicians, would the 'unwritten rule' be broken, although their subordinate staff still nearly always came from within the Office's ranks.

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[61] See Norman Hillmer, 'Anglo-Canadian Relations 1927-1929: Representation and Responsibility in the 'New Era' of Empire', Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Paper (1971), pp.13-18; Norman Hillmer, 'A British High Commissioner for Canada, 1927-28', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History (May 1973), pp.339-356

[62] Anonymous Minute, 7 December 1928, FO372/2444

[63] Liesching to Batterbee, 28 July 1938, Batterbee Papers (Box 9/1)

[64] Diary, 22 April 1940, Massey Papers (University of Toronto)

Responsibilities and Structure

The day-to-day methods of conducting business adopted by the DO were for the most part inherited from the CO. This meant that formal minuting and all official communications were sent in the name of the Secretary of State. Also a high proportion of work was generally done on paper, whether it be information for superiors, preparing internal memoranda or drafting communications. This would be placed in a jacket along with any previous correspondence on the subject and sent on to the appropriate department. If the question was not of a purely routine character the officer dealing with it would set out various points which he thought might need to be taken into consideration along with a recommended course of action. This would then be passed along to his senior who could choose to accept the advice already offered, adding any comments he thought necessary, seek alternative opinions from his colleagues or instead pass the matter on to a higher authority. This process would, if need be, repeated until the words 'at once' were added, signifying that that particular officer had taken a final decision.

This may have sounded a relatively straight-forward, if labourious, system but the question of assuming responsibility for the final decision was one which required a great deal of thought. An officer who signed last had to be prepared to take full responsibility for his actions. This meant considering whether a question he tackled was 'one which he may properly give a decision or whether it is one which may affect matters outside his own particular sphere'.[65] It also meant that the formulation of internal policy was an incredibly convoluted, time-consuming process and, by the war's outbreak this was the system that still, essentially, remained in place.[66]

The department's early organisation also drew heavily upon its immediate past, it being originally designed around the pattern of the old CO Dominions' Division. The work was divided into three departments and assigned partly on a subject basis and partly on a geographical one. With the passage of time though it became clear that business in the DO was increasingly being conducted by subject rather than by area. This approach allowed for greater speed and efficiency when it came to ensuring that each

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[65] Memorandum prepared by Robinson, 12 May 1937, CO886/32

[66] Comments made to author by Sir Geofroy Tory, May 2000

of the Dominions received messages from London at the same time. In so doing individuals could monitor reactions from each Dominion capital simultaneously, an advantage when it came to trying to provide a timely response. In the 1930s two new departments were consequently added to help deal with some of the increased responsibilities the Office had gained.[67] With the outbreak of war and a dramatic increase in workload further changes would take place as departmental responsibilities became blurred.

A source of additional support was the FO's Dominions Intelligence Department (DID), established in 1926 with the primary function of preparing information on foreign affairs for the DO to distribute to the Dominions. With a staff comprising of a Head of Department, one assistant and three juniors, it prepared so-called 'Intels' for the DO. These provided a survey of the international situation for Dominion governments, each of which at this stage had only the most rudimentary of External Affairs departments. With the growing tension in the 1930s, the service was substantially stepped up so that by 1939 huge numbers of documents were being generated for Dominion consumption. But 'in the stress of war...[the DID] virtually ceased to exist' and by mid-1940 it no longer provided any real coverage of events.[68] This would remain the case until early 1943 when a specific liaison officer with the FO was finally appointed. In the interim however the DO was forced to look elsewhere for its information.

Recruitment, unlike for potential members of the FO, was conducted through the Home Civil Service examination, placing the DO on the same footing as the other Home Departments in Whitehall. The reasoning behind this was to ensure that recruits were selected on their potential as administrators rather than as diplomats, even though their appointment involved a potential requirement to serve overseas where their duties would be predominantly diplomatic in character. One senior departmental member publicly argued however that 'when one talks about Dominions Office administration,

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[67] See Appendix Four. Also 'the only information available for the period 1940-1946 is as follows. During the war the boundaries of the departments altered frequently and new quasi-departments were added. In 1940 Department C split into C1 and C2'; see Thurston, *Records of the Colonial Office, Dominions Office...*, pp.351-353

[68] Minute by Sir Basil Newton, 25 November 1942, DO35/1002/52/10; handwritten comment, 'Foreign Affairs', 17 July 1942, DO35/998/7/48

one is really talking about something which is almost non-existent'.[69] Whatever the case, once recruited in this manner a great deal of time was spent by a new Office member learning his job. From appointment as Assistant Principal, the average recorded time to achieve promotion to Principal was a little under six years; during the first four years it was said that an officer had virtually no responsibility to take action on his own authority and there was little room for individual initiative. Only with approaching war and its unique demands would this system change, and throughout 1939 a whole series of Acting Principals were appointed.

Despite later being described as 'a department full of bachelors', the CO and DO were prominent among those Whitehall departments which refused to accept women within their ranks, a reflection perhaps of the dominance of Harding and Batterbee and their 'establishment' backgrounds.[70] Not until 1938 with Malcolm MacDonald at the helm - and whilst his Parliamentary Under-Secretary was carrying out an overseas tour - did first the CO and then the DO allow women entrants from the Home Civil Service examination. Very few applications were received before the onset of war. Even then the few entrants appear to have maintained an almost entirely periphery role, the comment being made in 1941 that there were 'some young women nominally juniors but they might just as well not be there, except that they are quite decorative'.[71] The war also led to four coloured men being employed for administrative work and one coloured woman taking a position in the Library.[72] It was said that no actual 'bar' existed within either department but it was noted at the war's end that it was not expected that coloured officers would remain once the examination procedure was resumed, the clear inference being that any such candidates who applied would not be selected.

In terms of the working day, before the outbreak of hostilities there was some measure of flexibility, it tending to begin very late with senior officers frequently not arriving at their desks before 11am. Here they normally stayed beyond 7pm each evening. The

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[69] Sir Herbert Stanley (Governor of South Rhodesia), 'Colonial and Dominion Office Administration', Public Administration (October 1938), pp.420-421

[70] Diary, 8 March 1940, Sydney Waterson Papers (Cape Town University)

[71] Shannon to Batterbee, 2 July 1941, Batterbee Papers (Box 10/5)

[72] See Parkinson, *The Colonial Office from Within*, pp.104-106

standard working week operated over five and a half days with every member of the Office working at least part of the Saturday. For some though the DO never closed and to ensure a twenty-four hour service, essential for dealing with messages from all parts of the world, quarters were made available for the Resident Clerk who would normally 'live-in' for a two week period.

Indeed as the DO developed so did its workload. Whether it be messages of the most formal kind, routine enquiries on individual matters or even personal notes between prime ministers, communications could be sent by mail or by telegraph and, in the latter case, in plain code or secret cypher. From the first week of November 1924 to the middle of July 1925, a total of 115 telegrams mentioning foreign affairs were sent out to the Dominions.[73] Just three years later, the total number of papers dealt with by the department's registry clerks had increased over thirty percent in the Office's first year of existence.[74] A telling indication of the amount of work involved at moments of the greatest pressure was given by MacDonald. In November 1938 he informed the House of Commons that 'the number of circular telegrams sent to each of the Dominion Governments on foreign affairs since the beginning of [the year]...had been 398', some 150 of these being sent during September and the Munich crisis.[75] Within less than a year by September 1939 there had been a dramatic increase and approximately 17,000 letters and telegrams had either been sent or received during the last eight months.[76]

Despite this volume of work, and all of the other pressures placed upon the officers who worked within the DO, at the outbreak of war morale was generally excellent. According to one of its members, summing up his feelings, life

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[73] Minute by Harding, 17 July 1925, DO35/1

[74] Minute by R.Hamblin, 10 April 1929, DO35/73

[75] Quoted in H.Duncan Hall, 'The British Commonwealth of Nations in War and Peace' in Elliot and Duncan Hall (ed.), *The British Commonwealth at War*, p.54; see also 'Interview given by Malcolm MacDonald to the Oxford Colonial Records Project', June/July 1970 (Rhodes House Library, Oxford) MSS.Brit.Emp s.533

[76] Speech by Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, October 1939, Avon Papers (University of Birmingham) AP20/7/51A

> ...was never dull - on the contrary this relatively tiny Department was called upon to handle work of a high degree of interest and variety, since it was concerned with the whole gamut of governmental business...together with the prospect of a posting overseas, this gave [it] something of the aura of an elite service and made it especially attractive.[77]

It was therefore an essentially positive attitude that prevailed in September 1939, when the department found itself facing what would prove to be its first and only war. Its role in this conflict, the significance of which Amery had pointed to only fourteen years before, would be to manage the wartime relationship between the Dominions and the British government and, where necessary, resolve problems to everybody's mutual satisfaction. There was no guarantee that this would be an easy task, with criticism ringing in its ears from individuals such as former Australian prime minister William Hughes with his argument that the 'department was as obsolete as the muzzle loading rifle and the hansom cab'.[78] But drawing upon what it had managed to learn during its relatively short existence and the knowledge of a few of the older members of the Office who had some memory of the CO's Dominions' Division during the First World War, it nonetheless embarked upon this wholly new experience.

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[77] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.32

[78] Quoted in Cross, *Whitehall and the Commonwealth*, pp.236-237

CHAPTER TWO

Preparations for War and the Role of the Dominions

(December 1937 – September 1939)

A Common Imperial Foreign Policy

In August 1914 the British government announced that it intended to defend Belgium's recently violated neutrality. Although this committed it to war with Germany, none of the Dominions hesitated in offering their broadly unconditional backing of the decision. Even in the case of the Union of South Africa, which had itself been involved in a conflict with Britain just twelve years before, the authorities readily acquiesced. The only stipulation from Pretoria was that their involvement in the new war should be restricted solely to matters of national defence. This support came after a period during which a number of senior Dominion figures had expressed growing anxieties about their relationship with London. Few doubts existed within the British government however that Dominion assistance would be offered.[1] With large populations of, in many cases, only recently arrived British settlers, emotional ties and moral concerns about the wider implications of German actions provided obvious *stimuli* for participation.[2] But there were, in fact, more compelling reasons which encouraged the Dominions not to hesitate in their decision.

In 1897 Canada had been the first of them to introduce a conditional form of Imperial Preference into its tariff. From this point onwards, escalating economic dependency effectively required all of the far-flung Dominions to retain the closest possible link with the fiscal actions of the authorities in London.[3] Also to be considered were the comments made at the 1911 Imperial Conference by the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Dire warnings had been given to the visiting Dominion leaders about Germany's European intentions and what, if they proved successful, this would mean for the British Empire. Having, for the first time, been 'initiated into the secrets of the foreign policy being pursued', for the Dominions to have then stood by and not supported Britain in the summer of 1914 would have been surprising.[4] For it must

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[1] See Hyam, 'The British Empire in the Edwardian Era' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, pp.56-57

[2] See Paul Hayes, 'British Foreign Policy and the Influence of Empire, 1870-1920', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume 12 (1984), pp.113-114

[3] See Walter Phelps Hall, *Empire to Commonwealth* (New York: 1928) pp.165-182; Edward Porrit, *The Fiscal and Diplomatic Freedom of the British Overseas Dominions* (London: 1922) pp.141-148

[4] BBC Research Manuals, *'Number 4, The Development of Self-Government in the British Empire'* (Abrams Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge) ABMS1/7/9, p.3

surely have been recognised throughout the respective Dominion capitals that if the centre were to collapse their position would be tenuous at best.[5]

The horrendous casualty figures of the 1914-18 war were to alter irrevocably the relationship placing enormous strains on the unity of the wartime coalition. Hence the introduction of Resolution IX at the specially convened 1917 Imperial War Conference, a hurried attempt at controlling what had become a growing diplomatic crisis. Reflecting the shared responsibility created by wartime pressures, this for the first time defined the Dominions as 'autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth' taking part in military operations only as a result of 'mutual consultation'.[6] Much of the reason behind the authorities in London agreeing to this description was the need to placate the concerns of the Dominion leaders who had temporarily relocated to the Empire's capital. It was also done, however, to assist the British government's guests in finding some measure of succour from the domestic criticism they faced.

Both aims were successfully accomplished but, with its formal elucidation of what had previously been a sometime vague relationship, the resolution also ensured that the Dominions would approach their future dealings with Britain in quite a different manner. Indeed, following the war's end, London's wartime allies were quick to demonstrate their strong desire to build upon this newly secured status. Resolution IX had stated that foreign policy would no longer be made solely by Whitehall but, instead, would be based upon 'continuous consultation'.[7] And for the peace conferences that followed the war's end, despite some reluctance by the British prime minister David Lloyd George, who had first invited them to London, the right to separate Dominion representation was secured. As a consequence, for the first time, each attending delegate signed the official documents on behalf of his own government. Whilst there continued to be differing interpretations of what the new relationship entailed, as the signing of the Locarno Treaty in 1925 again showed, each

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[5] See Martin Kitchen, *The British Empire and Commonwealth* (London: 1996) pp.61-63; Judd, *Empire*, pp.214-225; James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (London: 1985) pp.148-154; Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance*, pp.1-4; James Williamson, *Great Britain and the Commonwealth* (London, Third Edition: 1965) pp.178-180

[6]See Heather Harvey, *Consultation and Co-operation in the Commonwealth: A Handbook on Methods and Practice* (London: 1952) pp.90-92; Sir Percival Griffiths, *Empire into Commonwealth* (London: 1969) p.250

[7] See Frank Underhill, *The British Commonwealth* (London: 1956) pp.46-53

of the Dominion governments was now prepared to exercise to the full the widely accepted autonomy from British policy it felt it enjoyed.[8]

At the same time lengthy negotiations were being conducted behind the scenes between the FO in London and various Dominion politicians. In these some sympathy was shown towards claims that the Dominions should now have a more developed role in international affairs. But in many cases the Whitehall department's support was not offered out of any real conviction for the proposal. The rationale was, instead, a belief that the Dominions should take greater responsibility for their own problems leaving the British authorities free to focus on more important 'Great Power' issues. These negotiations saw their conclusion at the 1926 Imperial Conference with the celebrated opening address given to the Committee of Inter-Imperial Relations by the Lord President of the Council, Lord Balfour. Coming so soon after Lord Byng, the Governor-General in Ottawa, had chosen to intervene directly in Canadian domestic politics, this provided a forceful description of the wide-ranging nature of Dominions' autonomy. Crucially, in Balfour's opinion, this was also 'the only constitution possible if the British Empire is to [continue] to exist'.[9] With the 1931 Statute of Westminster, which attempted to formalise it and other, earlier statements, the Balfour Declaration provided the basis from which analysis of the inter-war Anglo-Dominion relationship would be conducted.[10]

Whilst such developments were portrayed as official policy, the British government, no doubt wary about the wider implications of its wartime promises, had already settled on a quite different private method for consulting with the Dominions. This was based on a simple premise, spelt out at the 1923 Imperial Conference, that 'a Government contemplating any negotiation should consider its effects upon the other Governments

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[8] See Darwin, 'The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV,* pp.67-69; Robert Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness, Britain and the World Role, 1900-70* (London: 1991) pp.87-120; Norman Hillmer, 'The Foreign Office, the Dominions and the Diplomatic Unity of the Empire, 1925-29' in David Dilks (ed.), *Retreat From Power, Volume One* (London: 1981) pp.64-65

[9] Speech at Edinburgh, 27 January 1927, quoted in George Bennett (ed.), *The Concept of Empire* (London; 1953) pp.398-402

[10] See Keith, *Speeches and Documents on the British Dominions,* pp.16-47; B.E.Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour, First Earl of Balfour, 1906-30* (London: 1936) p.381; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1939,* pp.1-88; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952,* pp.11-16; Harvey, *Consultation and Co-operation,* pp.1-10

and keep them informed'. With this in mind if, having been informed of its proposed intentions, no unduly adverse comments were received from the Dominion capitals, the authorities in London deemed themselves consequently free to proceed with policy as they saw fit.[11] During the 1930s, with the Union of South Africa and Canada both often preoccupied by distracting internal issues and New Zealand, and to a lesser but still significant degree Australia, both still captivated by the Imperial concept, critical responses were therefore a rare phenomenon.[12] And, in any case, as far as foreign policy was concerned the Dominion governments, with their undermanned and under-funded external affairs departments, seemed content to still depend on London's resources.[13]

The global financial crisis that worsened at the beginning of the 1930s only confirmed this, now placing even greater emphasis on the role played by the British government. With the world's economies in turmoil, at the Imperial Economic Conference held in Canada in September 1932, the importance of protective 'Imperial Preference' measures was re-endorsed by all sides. This took place against a backdrop of generally deteriorating political relations and the raising of more questions about the durability of the Dominion idea.[14] But there seemed few economic alternatives to the Ottawa agreements and although future commercial relations were often worse rather than better, the fiscal policies accepted by the Dominion governments kept them close to London, in mind if not always in heart. Despite the appearance of measures being implemented to update the Anglo-Dominion relationship, by the Second World War's outbreak the Dominions were therefore effectively no less financially dependent on Britain than they had been twenty-five years before.

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[11] Hankinson to Harvey, 28 March 1939, FO800/310

[12] MacDonald to Halifax, 23 March 1938, DO35/576; see Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* (London: 1959) p.277; F.L.W.Wood, 'The Dominion of New Zealand at War' in Elliot & Duncan Hall, *The British Commonwealth at War*, pp.407-412; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, p.16

[13] Lorna Lloyd, *Loosening the Apron Strings: the Dominions and Britain in the Inter-War Years*, p.9 (BISA/PSA Political Science Group Workshop Conference) July 1998; see John Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, Volume One* (Montreal: 1990) pp.111-213; R.G.Neale (ed.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-1949: Volume Two, 1939* (Canberra: 1976) pp.13-14; Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian Foreign Affairs 1941-1947* (Melbourne: 1980) pp.3-16

[14] See Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990* (London: 1993) pp.96-135; Denis Judd & Peter Slim, *The Evolution of the Modern Commonwealth* (London: 1982) pp.73-78

By the late 1930s however the political relationship between the British government and its often disadvantaged and more often disinterested Dominion counterparts had changed. Indeed by this stage, as international tensions worsened, its conditional nature was now increasingly clear as was the requirement that no significant threat should exist which might test the unity of the so-called Commonwealth of Nations.[15] When meeting in London for the 1937 Imperial Conference, with Germany's increasingly belligerent attitude much in the minds of those present, just such a challenge appeared to have emerged. So, with a majority of Dominion statesmen thinking squarely in terms of conciliation, within the DO the focus moved to considering what might happen should this approach fail.[16]

Thoughts About the Future

The probable attitude of the Dominions to their involvement in a second conflict fought by the United Kingdom in Europe had first been studied by the DO in 1935, just prior to the start of the Abyssinian crisis. This followed a post-Statute of Westminster review which had been carried out four years before leading to a memorandum on the likely procedure required for any future declaration of war.[17] Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary and secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, had also made a tour of the Dominions between September and December 1934, visiting the Union of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.[18] It was in early 1937 though that Sir Grattan Bushe, the department's long-serving legal adviser, revived the DO's interest in the question. In February of that year he had approached colleagues in the FO about concerns he held in regard to the Dominions' contemporary

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[15] Keith Middlemas, 'The Effect of Dominion Opinion on British Foreign Policy, 1937-1938' Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar Paper (1971), p.47

[16] See David Carlton, 'The Dominions and the Gathering Storm', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume 6, Number 2 (Jan 1978), pp.172-175; Max Beloff, *Dream of Commonwealth, 1921-42* (London: 1989) pp.270-298; Ritchie Ovendale, 'Why the British Dominions Declared War' in Robert Boyce and Esmonde Robertson (eds.), *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (New York: 1989) pp.276-296; Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World*, pp.38-63

[17] Dixon to Batterbee, 14 December 1937, DO35/543/28/5; ibid., letter from Malkin to Bushe, 18 February 1937, DO35/543/28/2

[18] See Ann Trotter, 'The Dominions and Imperial Defence: Hankey's Tour in 1934', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume 2 (1974), pp.318-332

views towards the question of 'common belligerency'.[19] The response he was given revealed doubts within the DO's sister department about the long-held principle that each Dominion was bound by the indivisibility of the King. Any discussions on the issue of continuing common allegiance to the British monarch were thought to be an 'appalling prospect', about which little could be done in advance to avoid or make easier. It was nonetheless agreed that some consultation about the procedure to be adopted would be beneficial for all concerned. But, overwhelmed with arrangements for the Imperial Conference due to be held that summer, the DO found scant free time at this stage for the consideration of any other matter.[20]

By the time the London gathering had been concluded and the department had returned to full strength in September 1937 following summer leave, Bushe's original enquiry had now taken on a more urgent tone. Having had an opportunity to consider the various notes the PUS, Sir Edward Harding, was clear that discussions which focussed on form 'would be a waste of energy' obscuring the government's most important objective, ensuring the Dominions' active support in the event of war.[21] Consequently, as an initial measure he directed that an updated assessment of the Dominions' state of readiness for war be prepared, placing Sir Harry Batterbee, his deputy and brother-in-law, in charge of the task.[22]

Utilising the considerable skills of Charles Dixon, a senior AUS whose other duties included monitoring Dominion foreign policy and defence matters, a draft memorandum entitled 'Probable Attitude and Preparedness of the Dominions in the Event of War', was ready for in-house inspection shortly before Christmas.[23] As its co-author himself admitted, it was broadly based on the conclusions made in the earlier 1935 document, the only significant alterations being in terms of detail and the addition of an individual study of each of the Dominions.[24] After further revision by Batterbee, this document

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[19] Bushe to Malkin, 8 February 1937, DO35/543/28/2

[20] Ibid., Malkin to Bushe, 18 February 1937

[21] Ibid., minute by Harding, 18 September 1937; see also Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.20

[22] Dixon to Batterbee, 14 December 1937, DO35/543/28/5

[23] Ibid., 'Memorandum prepared by Batterbee', December 1937 (see Appendix Five); Dixon Memoirs, Batterbee Papers (Box 20/5)

[24] Ibid., Dixon to Batterbee

was handed to the FO for further comments before being submitted to Malcolm MacDonald, the then Dominions' Secretary.[25] A second paper, prepared entirely by Dixon, which looked in more detail at the question of 'common belligerency', was reserved solely for internal DO distribution.[26]

Together the two documents totalled some fifteen pages. After a lengthy introduction, in which it was made clear that a truly definitive answer to the question was not possible, an analysis followed of what kind of conflict could be expected and how, specifically, Britain might become involved. The stark conclusion was that a war in defence of European commitments, but without any direct attack on Britain in the first instance, would very likely place considerable strains on the Anglo-Dominion relationship. And, if there had been no international effort to find a peaceful solution involving Britain and the Dominions beforehand, these strains would be considerably more difficult to manage. Already at this first drafting stage it was clear that whatever situation might develop, while there were few concerns over New Zealand and Australia providing support, it was the active participation by Canada and the Union that was considered to be a matter of real debate. Indeed, Dixon, in his internal comments, was so concerned about what might lie ahead that he urged upon his colleagues 'a certain fluidity of conception with regard to [assessing] the Commonwealth relationship'. In his estimate 'true wisdom seemed to lie in our recognising the facts and seeing how best we could get the maximum of advantage from the new situation', a sombre but perhaps entirely realistic appraisal.[27]

In his explanation of the memorandum's origins, Batterbee was more optimistic though, informing the Secretary of State of his hope that 'it will be alright on the night'.[28] At the same time he understood that it was impossible to ensure what was going to happen, and to not make provision accordingly would be 'foolish', adopting

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[25] Dixon to Malkin, 23 December 1937, DO35/543/28/4 (see Appendix Six)

[26] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.91-93; in comparing his account of events with that contained within the DO's original correspondence files, Garner, who had no involvement in the preparation of these documents, seems to have become a little confused in his narrative, at least in the earlier stages

[27] Ibid., 'Memorandum prepared by Batterbee', December 1937; Note prepared by Dixon, 'Position of the Dominions on the Event of War', December 1937, DO35/543/28/5 (see Appendix Seven)

[28] Ibid., Batterbee to MacDonald, 7 January 1938

'the policy of the ostrich'. Recognising that the assessment he had been given was 'very important', MacDonald's own views seem to have held a greater affinity with those held by the more junior of the two members of the department. He therefore urged the department's legal advisers to press on with their examinations 'as rapidly as is convenient in these rather hectic days'. However, despite these instructions and the Secretary of State's desire to avoid 'being caught napping on this point', following a second meeting with the FO at the end of January 1938 further progress was to prove difficult to achieve.[29]

According to the department's unofficial historian, this was because of continuing disagreements within Whitehall over the memorandum's wording and content.[30] Certainly the initial meetings held between the DO and the FO indicated that the issue was a contentious one likely requiring considerable further bilateral discussions over the best procedure to be pursued.[31] Complicating matters further, from the outset the Admiralty had also been interested, expressly in what the implications were for the various agreements they held with the Dominions for access to port facilities. It was at this stage that Sir Maurice Hankey, with his Australian background and extensive knowledge of Anglo-Dominion affairs, became involved. Holding a genuine desire to secure a greater role for the Dominions in policy formulation, he found himself asked to organise inter-departmental management and ensure that input was received from all interested parties.[32] His appointment only served, however, to aggravate an already complicated process, subjecting it to still further delays.[33]

The main barrier to progress though must surely have been international events themselves as Germany pushed its claims more and more forcibly during the course of

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[29] Ibid., minute by MacDonald, 21 January 1938; ibid., Malkin to Dixon, 11 January 1938

[30] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.94

[31] As part of the on-going review process of internal files adopted by the DO, in 1957 the majority of files D28/6 to D28/20 contained within DO35/543, covering approximately one year of the memorandum's progress, were deemed to be of insufficient historical interest to merit not being destroyed; see Thurston, *Records of the Colonial Office, Dominion Office...*, pp.62-64

[32] See P.G.Edwards, 'The Rise and Fall of the High Commissioner: S.M.Bruce in London, 1933-45' in A.F.Madden and W.H.Morris (ed.), *Studies in Commonwealth Politics and History: Australia and Britain* (London: 1986) p.54

[33] Batterbee to MacDonald, 7 January 1938, DO35/543/28/5

the year, placing serious pressures on the DO's resources. Although the department had doubled in size by the end of 1938, the total manpower available for dealing with all matters was still under seventy people.[34] Indeed, following Germany's union with Austria in March 1938, MacDonald warned the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, just how hard the department was having to work to keep the Dominion governments fully informed. As he would later recount, his staff found themselves in 'perpetual, non-stop touch with all [of the Dominions] on all international questions', leaving little spare time for other tasks.[35]

The crisis later in the year, which followed Germany's claims on Czechoslovakia's Sudeten areas, provided still more disruption to the memorandum's preparation.[36] The degree to which the Dominions played an active role in helping shape British policy during the Munich crisis continues to be a well-explored subject.[37] What does seem fairly certain though is that all of the Dominion governments, with the exception of one, were resolute supporters of a policy based upon the offer of concessions to the German leadership. New Zealand alone still clung to the League of Nation's 'collective security' banner.[38] With stark warnings filling the press of 'the potential collapse of the British Empire', there was therefore great pressure on a generally agreeable government in London to avoid war at all costs.[39]

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[34] See Cross, *Whitehall and the Commonwealth,* p.52; G.M.Carter, *British Commonwealth and International Security* (Toronto: 1947) pp.300-302

[35] MacDonald to Halifax, 10 April 1938, CAB123/246; also MacDonald, 'Interview to the Oxford Colonial Records Project' (Rhodes House Library) p.3

[36] See R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: 1993) pp.156-182; Keith Middlemas, *The Diplomacy of Illusion* (London: 1972) pp.21-23; H.Duncan Hall, *Commonwealth* (London: 1971) pp.753-762; Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: 1972) pp.228-229; Holland, *The Commonwealth Alliance*, pp.200-202; Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World*, pp.210-211

[37] See Michael Graham Fry, 'Agents and Structures: The Dominions and the Czechoslovak Crisis, September 1938', Diplomacy and Statecraft, Volume 10, Numbers 2&3 (1999); Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World*; Middlemas, *The Effect of Dominion Opinion,* pp.51-54; 'The Influence of the Commonwealth on British Foreign Policy: The Case of the Munich Crisis' in D.C.Watt, *Personalities and Policies* (London: 1965) pp.162-3

[38] See The Earl of Halifax, *Fullness of Days* (London: 1957) pp.197-198

[39] Lord Rothermere to Wickham Steed, published in the News Chronicle (London), 16 August 1938, quoted in F.R.Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-39* (Oxford: 1971) pp.18-19

This was felt by some contemporary commentators to be 'the nearest [the Dominions] had come to sharing a common foreign policy with Britain since 1919'.[40] For MacDonald, temporarily heading both the CO and DO, such was the interest that he was obliged to agree to requests by the hitherto largely dormant London-based Dominion High Commissioners for meetings, 'sometimes more than once a day', to brief them fully on developments.[41] These daily gatherings were in addition to the overwhelming flow of messages and telegrams already being provided by the DO to the Dominion governments. And, requiring a good deal of advance preparation by a variety of officials, not to mention actual attendance by others, they accounted for much valuable time.

A final reason for the memorandum being delayed may well have been provided by Batterbee himself. In July 1938 it was confirmed, after several months of rumours, that the last Dominion to rely solely on a Governor-General for communication with London had agreed to the DO sending out a High Commissioner.[42] As can be seen in his personal correspondence, following the announcement that it would be the 58-year old AUS making the long journey to New Zealand, Batterbee's attention seems often to have been distracted. And it was not just by the considerable relocation he and his wife were facing, but also the amount of work that he would be required to undertake prior to his departure.[43] Added to a genuine desire to avoid war, shared with Harding and the other senior staff at this time, there were clearly other factors to be considered which almost certainly added to the delays.[44]

Whatever the exact reasons, it was undeniably difficult to make any real headway. The only development of any note came when, following approval from the Attorney General in late September 1938, a preliminary summary was sent to the British High Commissioners in their respective capitals outlining a few of the department's more

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[40] Elliot and Duncan Hall, *The Commonwealth in War and Peace*, p.13

[41] Dixon Memoirs, Batterbee Papers (Box 20/5); see Malcolm MacDonald, *Titans and Others* (London: 1972) pp.80-1

[42] Liesching to Batterbee, 28 July 1938, Batterbee Papers (Box 9/1)

[43] Batterbee Papers (Box 6); minutes and correspondence regarding supply of papers to the UK High Commissioner in New Zealand, October/November 1938, DO35/548F

[44] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.88-89

general thoughts and asking in turn for their comments. But with the growing possibility of war with Germany at the forefront of discussion and the Dominions' reaction uncertain, at this stage this appears to have been the extent of what the DO could hope to achieve.[45]

Arguments about 'Common Belligerency'

Not until the beginning of 1939 did any really visible signs of progress begin to appear as, immediately following his return from Christmas leave, Batterbee cleared his desk ready for his imminent departure for Wellington.[46] In a meeting held without him at the DO in the first week of January, a much greater sense of departmental urgency was already on display. Involving representatives from the FO, Cabinet Office and Admiralty, the main topic for discussion was whether there could be 'a half-way house between neutrality and participation with the United Kingdom in war'.[47] Sir Edward Bridges, the Cabinet Office representative, had begun by speculating that, at most, the more reticent Dominion governments might merely mark time before joining Britain. The comments which followed from the DO must therefore have come as something of a shock to him, especially the suggestion that, in the event of war, the Royal Navy might even find itself forced to seize South African ports in order to guarantee unhindered access to them. In addition, although he had little to say on the merits of making further concessions, in chairing the meeting Harding was certain about one thing. This was the inadvisability of letting the Dominion governments know that the possibility of their remaining neutral was even being considered.[48]

Whilst continuing to claim to be fully aware of the need for the closer involvement of the Dominions in defence preparation, the FO nonetheless appeared to be as

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[45] DO to British High Commissioners, 28 September 1938, DO35/543/28/8; MacDonald, Dixon and Garner all make it clear in their respective works that, if war had arisen, of the Dominion countries only New Zealand was guaranteed to fight. Of the remainder Australia would probably have fought, but only reluctantly, Canada after some consideration would have decided not to, while the Union of South Africa would have almost certainly remained neutral

[46] Batterbee to Clark, 4 January 1939, Clark Papers (London School of Economics' Archives)

[47] 'Note of a meeting on 5 January 1939', DO35/543/28/21

[48] Although it is not within the remit of this study, Harding's warning extended as far as to also keeping the information from the Irish authorities

uninterested as it had been twelve months before. Its subsequent assessment of the meeting's conclusions, that its junior colleague should arrange another so as 'to settle a revised draft...for a document which might ultimately provide the basis of instruction to the High Commissioners', hardly appeared the most decisive of contributions.[49] It was not for them to decide upon how events should proceed however and John Stephenson, who had assumed Batterbee's role, now began to push Bridges for some agreement as to what should be done. As he did this though, further significant departmental changes were taking place around him.[50]

Sir Thomas Inskip, who as Minister for Co-ordination of Defence had berated the Dominions at the 1937 Imperial Conference for encouraging others to make heroic sacrifices on their behalf, was suddenly moved to what Chamberlain described to him as the '[not] very absorbing [Dominions] Department'.[51] Publicly it was understood that 'Honest Tom', as his barrister colleagues had long before nicknamed him, was the scapegoat for increasing dissatisfaction over government policies. Privately though it appears that much of the reason for his demotion was because he had come to believe that war was now certain to happen leaving him at odds with the prime minister.[52] Whatever the exact case, although surprised by the decision, he claimed he 'was not sorry to give up [his former job] for a most interesting but less exposed position'.[53]

Whilst the department set about acquainting its new head with current business, the more pressing task for the senior staff was contacting the High Commissioners in the Union of South Africa and Canada. This was done to inform them that 'matters were in hand', provide them with the complete draft memorandum of the anticipated

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[49] Donald Lammers, 'From Whitehall After Munich: The Foreign Office and the Future Course of British Policy', The Historical Journal, Volume 16, Number 4 (1973), p.832; Malkin to Dixon, 10 January 1939, DO35/543/28/21

[50] Ibid., minute by Stephenson, 26 January 1939; Bridges to Dixon, 24 January 1939

[51] Holland, *The Commonwealth Alliance*, pp.198-199; Diary, 17 January 1939, Inskip Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge) INKP1/2

[52] See Sean Greenwood, 'Caligula's Horse Revisited: Sir Thomas Inskip as Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, 1936-1939', Journal of Strategic Studies, Volume 17, Number 2 (June 1994), pp.17-38; 'Cato', *Guilty Men* (London: 1940) p.79

[53] Inskip to Simon, 31 January 1939, Simon Papers (Bodleian Library, Oxford) Box 85

Dominions reaction in the event of war and ask in return for their expanded opinions.[54] At the same time, apologising for his 'having been rather long in writing', by mid-February Bridges was finally able to inform the DO of his views.[55] These were generally optimistic, indeed perhaps even overly so, the Cabinet Office official choosing to believe that the Dominions 'would surely, when the time comes, be prepared to recognise...that supreme control can only be exercised by those at the centre'. This was much the same argument as he had given two months before.

Aside from the long delay, a further cause for anger within the DO was that, despite repeated pleas that the matter required complete secrecy, Harding had had to intervene during the interim to prevent the Cabinet Office from approaching the Service Departments directly to obtain their views.[56] This clearly pointed to a potential for later difficulties. And, although the War Office and Air Ministry were 'probably willing to fall in line' with the DO's suggested approach, the same was not true of the Admiralty. The latter 'tended in the direction of attempting to force the hand of the Dominions', warning that, if need be, the matter would have to be put before the Committee for Imperial Defence for settlement. This confrontational approach ran entirely contrary to all of the advice the DO had given over recent years. It also once more amply demonstrated the degree to which the department's views were still often dismissed by supposed colleagues.

In exchanges such as these it was all too apparent that, despite making ever-greater efforts on its part, the DO was still struggling to educate some of its colleagues as to the reality of the Anglo-Dominion relationship. While his department heads were fighting to make any headway even Inskip, already 'settling in well [and] really studying his papers', was being advised by the foreign secretary that the Dominions should be expected to 'trust us to draw a just conclusion from the reports we receive'.[57] With assessments now being submitted by the British High Commissioners outlining their perceptions of the position in their Dominions, much work was obviously

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[54] Harding to Campbell/Clark, 1 February 1939, DO35/543/28/21

[55] Bridges to Minister, 1 March 1939, CAB21/488

[56] Bridges to Harding, 13 February 1939, DO35/543/28/21

[57] Harding to Batterbee, 18 February 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4); Halifax to Inskip, 2 March 1939, FO372/3315

still needed to show that 'common belligerency' had become a concept that could no longer be taken for granted.[58]

The Reaction to Prague

As rumours grew towards the end of January 1939 of possible German attacks against Holland or Switzerland, the DO had sent out a telegram warning that Hitler would probably soon embark on some kind of aggression. The response of the Dominion governments was to complain to London that such a suggestion was unduly alarmist. In mid-March however this was shown to be far from the case as German troops finally seized the rump Czech state. Within days, and without any advance notice to the Dominions, although there is no evidence to suggest his personal convictions had changed, the British prime minister announced a radical change in British foreign policy. But the strategy that he now chose to adopt was one almost entirely at odds with the DO's assessments of what would most likely secure the Dominions' conclusive support.[59]

The High Commissioners in London, whose elevated role during the Sudeten crisis had led them to develop a much higher opinion of their own importance, were the first to respond. Although they had varying knowledge and experience of politics in their home Dominions, they did each possess equally forceful personalities. Within DO circles, the former Australian prime minister Stanley Bruce was seen as very down-to-earth, whilst the South African Charles te Water was more acute but just as well-respected. The Canadian High Commissioner Vincent Massey, another former prime minster, had the most aristocratic turn of mind; his diaries reveal someone who enjoyed golf, art, staying at the Dorchester and most of all anything connected with the British royal family. And finally there was Bill Jordan, the former London policeman turned New Zealand representative, who was rarely treated seriously but was liked immensely because of his friendliness.[60] As a group, and despite some commentators' later claims

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[58] Clark to Harding, 20 February 1939, DO35/543/28/23; Whiskard to Inskip, 16 March 1939, DO121/46; Campbell to Inskip, 24 March 1939, FO800/310

[59] See Dixon Memoirs, Batterbee Papers (Box 20/5); Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp.201-2; P.M.H.Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: 1986) pp.252-254

[60] Garner quoted in Cumpston, *Lord Bruce of Melbourne*, p.159

to the contrary, these men would quickly make it clear that the Dominions' support for further negotiation had not yet finished.[61]

Six years previously te Water had bluntly informed the then Secretary of State, J.H.Thomas, that 'if there was another war...none of the Dominions would follow the United Kingdom'.[62] The intervening period had not seen his views alter and, with his Canadian counterpart in tow, he now left Inskip in little doubt as to his colleagues' general support for offering Germany one more 'chance of saving face'.[63] Much of the reason for the apparent rancour in is statements lay with Chamberlain's failure to provide the High Commissioners with any advance warning of his policy change. For those members of the DO who were still labouring to provoke any meaningful form of debate, it meant that the situation had become even more difficult.[64]

The department had been able to provide some indication at the end of March that it was intended to provide a guarantee of security to Poland, the first of a number of such assurances that would be given to various European states. This had done little, however, to relieve the tense atmosphere. Further trouble lay ahead in the debate over the future status of Danzig. Originally a German city, since the Versailles settlement it had been administered by the League of Nations and was separated by the so-called 'Polish Corridor' from the Germany to the west. To the High Commissioners it was therefore seen in the same light as the Sudeten debate and any guarantee involving it was consequently problematic to them. Indeed, when informed of a move by the British authorities that wholly disregarded these concerns, Massey felt suitably aggrieved to complain that Danzig had always been 'a running sore which some time or other would be required to be cut out'.[65]

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[61] See Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, p.283; Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.90; Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance*, p.204; Lorna Lloyd, *'What's in a Name?': The Curious Tale of the Office of High Commissioner,* p.4-6 (BISA/PSA Political Science Group Workshop Conference) July 1998

[62] Minute by Harding, 2 May 1933, DO35/100

[63] High Commissioner's Meeting (hereafter 'HC'), 21 March 1939, DO121/5; Campbell to Inskip, 24 March 1939, FO800/310

[64] HC, 20 March 1939, DO121/5

[65] Ibid., HC, 30 March 1939

With the public confirmation of the Polish guarantee, although none of the Dominion governments chose to make any direct comment, they were clearly deeply upset about the news. A 'staggered' Jan Smuts, the deputy South African prime minister, felt it to be 'mere surrender to panic, mak[ing] war inevitable'.[66] Mackenzie King, the Canadian leader, thought the decision amounted to 'a conditional declaration of war'.[67] Even worse to him though was the fact that this had 'certainly been done without anything in the nature of consultations with Canada or any of the Dominions'. With the idea being raised for the first time in the High Commissioners' meetings of offering Germany a non-aggression pact alongside growing requests for access to FO telegrams, something which it was accepted within the DO it would be hard to refuse, the strains on the department and those within it were mounting.[68]

Writing to his old friend recently arrived in New Zealand, Harding, who had been 'pursued with pouches and telephones on most days', although 'not too happy at all these guarantees', could not see that there was any alternative. But the knowledge that no Dominion government had made any outward sign suggesting that this was the wrong policy did appear to offer him some measure of reassurance.[69] He was also pleased that his colleagues were 'working gallantly and the machine...[was] standing the strain well'. With this attitude and no shortage of evidence that defence preparedness was now the key issue, efforts to finalise the increasingly long-delayed, but now more important than ever memorandum were renewed.[70] Towards the end of April, with Admiralty objections seemingly calmed, the final draft was at last ready to be issued to the principal Whitehall departments concerned, prior to a wider government distribution.[71]

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[66] Smuts to Duncan, 25 April 1939, Duncan Papers (University of Cape Town); Smuts to Gullet, 6 April 1939, Smuts Papers (National Archives, Pretoria)

[67] Mackenzie King Diary, 31 March 1939, Mackenzie King Papers (National Archives of Canada, Ottawa), MG26, J13, Fiche 129-130; see J.L.Granatstein & R.Bothwell, 'A Self-Evident National Duty: Canadian Foreign Policy, 1935-39', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume 3, Number 2 (January 1975), p.228

[68] HC, 6 April 1939, DO121/5; ibid., HC, 12 April 1939; ibid., Stephenson to Harding, 12 April 1939

[69] Harding to Batterbee, 16 April 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[70] Harding to Bridges, 6 April 1939, DO35/548D/1/57

[71] Harding to Creedy (War Office), 19 April 1939, CAB104/19

Running to some forty pages in length and encompassing considerable discussion of military and economic factors, as in earlier versions and for exactly the same reasons the revised document made little mention of New Zealand and Australia. Once again its main focus remained the likely reactions of Canada and the Union of South Africa although, in the intervening three months, some of the earlier conclusions had changed.[72] Largely as a result of a series of 'solid' dispatches from Sir Gerald Campbell, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, it was now felt Canada would 'participate in any circumstances in which the United Kingdom is likely, so far as can be seen at present, to become involved'. Sir William Clark in Cape Town was also seen by some observers within the DO to have cautiously improved his assessment allowing them to conclude, by late-April, that 'force of circumstances would probably compel the Union government to eventually participate (sic)'.

With a markedly far more positive tone, this final report was therefore almost completely at odds with the draft analysis produced only three months beforehand. Indeed in arriving at its generally far more optimistic conclusions, those comments which could have been seen to be worrisome appeared to have been overlooked or ignored. This was certainly the case in regard to the various telegrams sent by Clark during February and March 1939 which carried warnings about almost inevitable 'delays [and] confusion' in the Union. The report also omitted the generally negative outlook still affecting the Dominions High Commissioners in London.[73] By the time of its eventual release however new moves by the British government meant that the conclusions contained within the memorandum were all, once again, in any case in question.

Although strongly opposed to the idea, Chamberlain had been reluctantly forced to accede to the House of Commons call, made in mid-April, to pursue an alliance with the Soviet Union in order to bolster the previous guarantees.[74] For the DO, beset by what Harding felt to be an 'ominous lull', the news of yet another possible guarantee

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[72] Ibid., 'Memorandum', April 1939; Campbell to Stephenson, 19 April 1939; Clark to Harding, 20 February 1939, DO35/543/28/23; Clark to Harding, 28 April 1939, CAB104/19

[73] Clark to Harding, 20 February 1939, DO35/543/28/23; Clark to Harding, 13 March 1939, CAB104/19

[74] See Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp.216-246; John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London: 1989) pp.180-85

was a terrible blow as the telegrams arriving from the Dominions over the next few weeks, united as they were in condemnation of the move, made only too clear.[75] Only New Zealand, with its broadly socialist government, welcomed the move. Even this support was conditional though as the authorities in Wellington placed themselves at odds with their Dominion colleagues warning that they would now 'regard it as deplorable if Russian assistance in the prevention of aggression were not secured'.[76] As the memorandum and its predictions of unanimous Dominion support whatever the case went to print, such confidence from the British authorities therefore seemed increasingly misplaced.[77]

A Summer of Inactivity

With the High Commissioners still clinging to now well-trodden arguments and the Dominion governments showing little enthusiasm to make any declaration of public support for London's increasingly belligerent stance, at the end of May the memorandum was finally released.[78] So sensitive were its contents however that the Cabinet Office, finally perhaps recognising some of the DO's longstanding arguments, restricted its circulation to 'Ministers who would be mainly concerned with the conduct of the war'.[79] At the same time, the British High Commissioners in the various Dominion capitals were warned to make no mention of its existence 'until the necessity should arise'.

Harding, sending a copy to Inskip who had himself had only the faintest awareness that such a document was being prepared, tried to attach a more optimistic appraisal on its contents than he had done before. Now he hoped that there would 'never be occasion to take action [on it] or that, if there is, the difficulties anticipated will not, in

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[75] Harding to Batterbee, 4 May 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4); Aide Memoire from the South African Cabinet, 22 April 1939, DO114/98; Whiskard to Inskip, 28 April 1939, DO121/46; Campbell to Stephenson, 13 May 1939, CAB104/19

[76] Telegram from New Zealand Government, 12 May 1939, DO114/98; see Angus Ross, 'Reluctant Dominion or Dutiful Daughter? New Zealand and the Commonwealth in the Inter-War Years', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Volume 10, Number 1 (1972)

[77]Harding to Clark, 22 May 1939, DO35/543/28/32

[78] HC, 23 May 1939, DO121/5

[79] Minute by Dixon, 24 May 1939, DO35/543/28/32; ibid., minute by Stephenson, 27 May 1939

practice, prove unduly serious'. Such a reappraisal may well have been an indication that the DO's most senior official, despite his publicly stated support for the government's more recently belligerent policies, was in fact privately still hopeful of a diplomatic solution. The Secretary of State though, who Harding himself had described just a month earlier as 'not having the knowledge or the temperament [for the job]', appeared to have few concerns. In fact he did little more than commend the quality of the work and thank 'Mr Dixon for the impressive amount of trouble' he had taken in its preparation.[80]

In the meantime however, at least one member of the FO's Dominions Intelligence Department had made a radical reassessment of the situation. Following a discussion with the South African High Commissioner's private secretary in April, Robert Hadow had felt sufficiently confident to declare that 'South Africa would most certainly come in should we be involved in war'. This statement matched a number of optimistic assessments distributed internally throughout the FO during the previous months.[81] But now, having read the most recent correspondence from the Dominions following the Soviet announcement, Hadow was not so confident.[82] Indeed he now advised Sir Alexander Cadogan, his departmental head, that in the event of an Anglo-Soviet alliance 'we stand the risk of South African neutrality at the outset of war, perhaps only for a while but with dangerous possibilities'. His concerns however appear to have raised few anxieties amongst his colleagues, many of whom were no doubt pre-occupied with the proposed Russian negotiations, and Hadow's warnings were dismissed as overly dramatic.[83]

Within the DO meanwhile, with the memorandum completed and its conclusions submitted, an exhausted hiatus now descended. Meaningful comment from the Dominion governments on the deteriorating international situation was still hard to come by, only New Zealand and Australia offering any real indication of their current

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[80] Ibid., minute by Harding, 25 May 1939; minute by Inskip, 25 May 1939; Harding to Batterbee, 16 April 1939, DO35/543/28/32

[81] Minute by F.H.Cleobury, 26 January 1939, FO372/3314; ibid., minute by Cleobury, 6 April 1939

[82] Minute by Hadow, 19 April 1939, FO372/3314

[83] Ibid., minute by Hadow, 24 May 1939; minute by Cadogan, 31 May 1939, FO800/310; see Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World*, p.275

thinking.[84] Even the High Commissioners based in London had apparently run out of observations to make.[85] As negotiations over possible Anglo-Soviet co-operation continued throughout the summer, nothing of any great significance therefore took place. The sole event of any consequence, although it was not yet widely known, was the news that Harding would soon be leaving the DO to become High Commissioner in South Africa, replacing Clark whose health had become questionable. With Batterbee already departed and his brother-in-law soon to join him in an overseas' posting, this meant that two of the department's founding figures would, by the war's beginning, be almost entirely distant from London.[86]

As August began and security arrangements within the Office were once more tightened, a not immediately obvious 'July rush' was replaced by a calmer environment as many of the department's staff went on summer leave.[87] For one of the senior officers there was little opportunity to take advantage of the break though as Stephenson found himself hospitalised by an attack of piles.[88] The lull was not particularly long lasting however, it being quickly shattered by a surprise announcement. The conclusion of a non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union made a second war in defence of European commitments in twenty-five years now virtually unavoidable.

For a quorum of the Dominion High Commissioners in London, the news was difficult to accept, so much so that they embarked upon one final effort to try and gain support for further negotiation. As part of these final efforts renewed calls were issued to the DO to arrange greater access to Committee of Imperial Defence meetings but to no avail.[89] This was in part because Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, had quickly destroyed any chance of success they might have had. His clumsy attempts to persuade the British government to pressure its Polish counterpart into accepting

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[84] Batterbee to DO, 23 May 1939, CAB104/19; Fairburn to Earl de la Warr, 9 May 1939, DO121/46

[85] 'Index of HC Meetings', DO121/5

[86] Harding to Batterbee, 9 July 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[87] 'Minutes of a meeting to discuss security', 5 August 1939, DO35/548D/3/126

[88] Harding to Batterbee, 6 August 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[89] Inskip to Lord Chatfield, 23 August 1939, CAB21/2464

Germany's demands had the effect of 'much reducing [Chamberlain's] confidence in him - [which] was never very high'.[90] A further seven meetings with the High Commissioners would take place during the following week with the efforts of certain of those present to find a peaceful outcome continuing to the very end.[91] But these would prove of little consequence in the face of the now apparently much more determined British governmental stance.

For the DO however, a serious problem had developed which appeared to have the potential to threaten this newfound resolve. In a telegram sent during the last week of August, the department was again warned, only now more urgently, that in the Union of South Africa, Nationalists had gained ground in the preceding weeks. At the same time it was now thought by Clark that 'this defeat for British policy [the German-Soviet pact] may also influence public opinion towards neutrality owing to the feeling that there has been mismanagement'.[92] With this warning it was obvious that, despite the considerable time that had been spent in its preparation, at least some of the conclusions made within the memorandum were misplaced. Indeed even members of the hitherto confident FO were finally forced to admit that suddenly the situation had become not so encouraging.[93]

Throughout the previous months, Clark had actually given little reason to suppose that there was any real degree of certainty that the government in the Union would blithely follow London's lead. Indeed his reports were clear that, under the leadership of General Hertzog, the idea of 'common belligerency' no longer existed within sizeable elements of South African opinion. The Union's prime minister had made this clear himself as early as the 1937 Imperial Conference with his uncompromising support for conciliation with Germany and a firm rejection of his country's involvement in any future European war. But these messages had not been heeded and the result was a crisis that now seemed to potentially threaten Imperial unity. For the DO though, the

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[90] HC, 22 August 1939, DO121/5; Dairy, 23 August 1939, Hankey Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge) HNKY1/7; Diary, 25 August 1939, Inskip Papers

[91] 'Index of HC Meetings', DO121/5; 'Germany and Great Britain, Settlement', note by Massey, 31 August 1939, Massey Family Papers (National Archives of Canada)

[92] Clark to Harding, 24 August 1939; minute by Hadow, 9 August 1939, FO371/23964

[93] Ibid., minute by Scott, 31 August 1939

most pressing problem in the first instance was that it appeared to have few solutions readily to hand on how to deal with the situation.

The Union of South Africa and the Neutrality Crisis

In September 1939 the Dominion governments did not have any particular commitments binding them to go to war in Europe. None had been signatories to the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, or to the renewed guarantee of Belgian neutrality in the same year. Nor were any of them directly involved in the negotiations at Munich two years later. Still more recently, no Dominion minister had put his name to the Polish guarantee in March 1939 or to those given to Romania and Greece in April 1939 and the later alliance with Turkey. Although there was every indication that this lack of visible participation in British policy-making would hold little actual significance for three of them, the potential attitude of the Union of South Africa was different.[94]

Ever since the process of drafting the 'Probable Attitude and Preparedness of the Dominions in the Event of War' memorandum had begun in late 1937, the extremely complex political situation within the Union had been a prominent cause for concern within the DO. Many within the large Nationalist *Afrikaans* speaking minority, of which the country's prime minister General Hertzog was one of the more moderate members, displayed a good deal of sympathy with German actions in Europe.[95] The English speaking section of the population, which generally adopted a similar approach to Smuts, were in turn likely in most cases to support Whitehall's policies. The only point upon which both sides could find any measure of consensus was their desire to retain control of the former German colony of South West Africa, the return of which Berlin had demanded.[96] With the telegrams from Pretoria suggesting that the long-held idea of

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[94] See H.V.Hodson, 'British Foreign Policy and the Dominions', Foreign Affairs, Volume 17 (July 1939), pp.753-763; H.V.Hodson, 'Collective Security and Empire Defence', United Empire, Volume 30 (1939), pp.745-747; Eric Siepmann, 'The Neutrality of South Africa', The Nineteenth Century (September 1939), pp.279-294; H.Duncan Hall, 'The British Commonwealth of Nations at War' in Elliot & Duncan Hall, *The British Commonwealth at War*, pp.19-27; ibid., Lucretia Ilsley, 'The Union of South Africa in the War', pp.426-432

[95] See Albert Grundlingh, 'The King's Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa's Defence Force During the Second World War, 1939-45', Journal of African History, Volume 40 (1999), pp.353-354; Van der Heever, *General J.B.M.Hertzog*, pp.278-283

[96] See Andrew Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies* (London: 1988); see also DO35/1517/211/1 containing a document discovered in Berlin in 1945 by Allied investigators which

Empire unity was now under threat, the greatest concern was the fact that Hertzog was prime minister and Smuts only his deputy.

The potentially adverse effect on morale throughout the Empire if South Africa failed to join the war was not however the sole worrying point. Although it had never been envisaged that they would provide a huge reserve of troops, the loss of a potential source of manpower remained and this was a serious blow in light of the British and French strategy adopted.[97] With the government in London just beginning to face up to the fiscal costs that another war would involve, there were also considerable financial practicalities to be considered. Adding to this was the knowledge that the financial pressure placed on the pound during 1939 had reduced Britain's war chest of gold and foreign securities by at least one-quarter.[98] As an internal memorandum prepared by the Treasury had concluded, so bad was the situation that 'unless when the time comes the United States are prepared either to lend or give money as required, the prospects for a long war are becoming exceedingly grim'.[99] The undertaking of a rapid rearmament, begun after the Munich settlement, had placed further strains on resources and the situation was only likely to get worse.[100] In this context exports of South African gold to the United States were not just extremely valuable but an irreplaceable economic asset.[101]

In Clark's view, the best chance of avoiding an Imperial rift lay with Smuts who was still 'all for bringing the Union in on our side if war supervenes'. Indeed with Hertzog's

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revealed that Hertzog had considered accepting German offers to negotiate about the future of South West Africa in 1937/38. Although he had kept the DO informed, the post-war department was worried about what effect the news might have on imperial relations and suppressed the information. Also see D.C.Watt, 'South African Attempts to Mediate Between Britain and Germany, 1935-1938' in K.Bourne and D.C.Watt (eds.), *Studies in International History* (London: Longmans, 1967)

[97] See G.C.Peden, 'The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Reconsidered', Historical Journal, Volume 27 (1984), pp.406-421

[98] See R.A.C.Parker, 'The American Treasury and British Preparations for War, 1938-1939', English Historical Review (April 1983), pp.261-279; Alan Milward, *The Economic Effects of the Two World Wars on Britain* (London, Second Edition: 1984) pp.66-70

[99] 'Memorandum on Financial Situation', prepared by the Treasury, 9 July 1939, CAB24/287

[100] See Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy, 1914-1990* (London: 1992) pp.157-158; Richard Overy, 'Cyclops' in Reynolds & Kimball (et al), *Allies at War* (New York: 1994) pp.114-115

[101] See Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction*, pp.96-100

resolute refusal to believe that war could comė, throughout 1939's mounting tension the High Commissioner had sought to strengthen the already close friendship he enjoyed with the Union's deputy prime minister. In the process he appeared to have developed a close understanding with Smuts. And with the onset of a crisis in Anglo-South African relations, it was now time for Clark to attempt to fully utilise this link. But South Africa's High Commissioner in London, a longstanding friend and admirer of Hertzog, still continued to press that the British tone should indicate a willingness 'to negotiate on all political and economic matters'.[102] Meanwhile the DO continued to closely monitor the now daily telegrams from Pretoria for any hopeful signs, at the same time supplying regular situation briefings to Clark who did not trust the Union's Department of External Affairs to keep Smuts fully informed.[103]

The unanticipated news that the life of the South African Senate would expire in the first week of September, something apparently overlooked by all sides, carried obvious positive ramifications as far as London was concerned.[104] Unless there was a meeting of both South African Houses, the Assembly and the Senate, to pass a law extending the latter's life, no legislation passed within the Union could be considered valid.[105] With a strong belief that his prime minister would 'probably seek to play for delay by postponing as long as possible the summoning of Parliament', this presented Smuts with an opportunity to force the issue of neutrality or belligerency.[106]

By the first day of September 1939 it was clear that if, as was widely expected, settlement should prove impossible in Europe, three of the four Dominions could be counted on to declare their support for Britain. Two of these would do so at once and the other, Canada, after its parliament had been summoned to ratify the decision.[107] The Union of South Africa would however face a potentially destructive debate during

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[102] Minute by Cleobury, 2 August 1939, FO372/3314; ibid., HC, 26 August 1939; HC, 30 August 1939; HC, 31 August 1939

[103] Clark to Harding, 25 August 1939, FO371/23964; Diary, 26 August 1939, Inskip Papers

[104] Clark to Harding, 26 August 1939, FO371/23964

[105] See Deneys Reitz, *No Outspan* (London: 1943) pp.236-237

[106] Clark to Harding, 25 August 1939; Clark to Harding, 29 August 1939, FO371/23964

[107] Canadian Government to DO, 1 September 1939, DO35/543/28/52; Cabinet Meeting 47(39), 1 September 1939, DO35/543/28/46A

which a rupture in the governing party seemed likely to take place. What was therefore vital for the British government was to determine the outcome of this split and if anything could be done to ensure its prevention. This task was not helped however by the considerable confusion, first anticipated back in the Spring, which now existed. In the space of just a single day te Water was first reported as believing that the Union would join Britain despite Nationalist opposition, only subsequently for it to be said that he was still strongly supporting neutrality.[108] Meanwhile, according to Lady Milner, ministers in the Union itself were saying that the British government actually desired South African neutrality. These rumours led Smuts once again to approach London directly for advice.[109] As he did so speculation was growing that serious trouble was potentially imminent in the country and even a possible repeat of the events of 1914 when an internal rebellion was attempted. In such an obviously tense environment, Clark had already stressed to the DO that the key factor would be whether Patrick Duncan, the Governor-General in the Union, would be 'strong enough to refuse the disastrous request [for a dissolution]'.[110]

When the South African parliament met on 2 September 1939 to extend the life of the Senate, it did so in the knowledge that Germany had the day before invaded Poland and, unless it withdrew, the British government's guarantee obliged that it would almost certainly soon declare war. And as the DO had anticipated, once Hertzog had announced the summoning of parliament from its winter recess in Pretoria to Cape Town, he could no longer evade a full discussion of the course that should be taken by the Union. Being a Saturday he was however able to adjourn the debate for two days giving all the parties concerned a final opportunity to consider strategies.[111] This delay also allowed, with the expiry of the British deadline to Germany, for the long-feared formal declaration of a war to be made by the government in London. Chamberlain almost at once contacted Hertzog asking him directly that he 'do his utmost to help us in this critical time'. At the same time the British prime minister instructed the DO to contact Clark and reiterate to him that London's primary concern was the 'avoidance

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[108] Ibid., DO to Clark, 1 September 1939

[109] Clark to DO, 2 September 1939, DO35/543/28/47

[110] Ibid., Clark to Harding, 29 August 1939, FO371/23964

[111] Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/4/1

of any declaration of neutrality by the Union'.[112] But as these messages were being dictated, the South African prime minister was still trying desperately to secure the support needed to keep out of the war.[113]

The events of the following twenty-four hours tested to the full the premise still held by some in Whitehall that the member nations of the British Commonwealth were bound together by an integral constitutional bond.[114] But the eventual conclusion to the most serious crisis to threaten the Anglo-Dominion relationship since 1917 had only limited input from the central government in London. With events taking place in and around the Parliament buildings in Cape Town at a rapid pace, the DO's representative was the only British figure who could play any role. One of the department's most accomplished and experienced members, Clark amply demonstrated why the Office had campaigned so vigorously at its creation that it should select future British High Commissioners and not the FO.[115] He remained in more or less constant conference with Smuts and, bearing in mind his earlier warning about who ultimately would decide the outcome of the crisis, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that the High Commissioner also ensured he provided every physical assistance he could to Duncan.[116]

A 'modern' Governor-General in the sense that he had been chosen by the government of the country in which he served and not by its counterpart in London, prior to accepting his most recent position, Duncan had himself enjoyed a long and distinguished political career in the Union. During the neutrality crisis though, as the King's agent his loyalties had remained firmly with his regent as he met daily with Clark to receive guidance. Indeed, such was their contact between parliament's first and last meetings that one DO official, looking at events from the periphery, felt it

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[112] Ibid., Chamberlain to Hertzog, 3 September 1939; DO to Clark, 3 September 1939, DO35/543/28/47

[113] Ibid., Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939

[114] See H.V.Hodson, *The British Empire* (London: 1942) pp.6-8

[115] See H.J.Martin & Neil D.Orpen, *South Africa at War: Volume VII* (Cape Town: 1979) pp.22-23; B.K.Long, *In Smuts Camp* (London: 1945) pp.69-83; G.Heaton Nicholls, *South Africa in My Time* (London: 1961) pp.335-346; Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and Nations,* pp.14-15

[116] Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/4/1

placed 'the High Commissioner in a somewhat embarrassing position'.[117] Prior to the last of these Clark's own notes admitted that he had both acted as an entirely unofficial conduit of information from Duncan to Smuts and that he had received specific instructions from London on how to deal with these 'altogether exceptional circumstances'.[118] Inskip, in his last act after having been replaced as Secretary of State by Anthony Eden, also noted that he had worked with Eric Machtig on a telegram containing specific guidance 'to help Patrick Duncan to refuse a dissolution if Hertzog asked for one'.[119]

When the final vote came, all the effort that had been made by the DO and Clark was not found wanting. Smuts emerged with a clear majority and Hertzog, as he had intimated he would do, approached the Governor-General for a dissolution. This was in turn rejected and Duncan asked the former deputy prime minister to establish a new cabinet. This was exactly the result that London had wanted as a greatly relieved Chamberlain was quick to inform his new Dominion counterpart.[120] The FO was also, broadly, pleased with the outcome noting that it meant that Britain's 'vital needs and interests cannot be imperilled', although, 'in the want of a long and trying war', the way in which the result had emerged was most unfortunate.[121] Whether this referred to the bitter debate in the South African parliament or the actions of the British High Commissioner is unclear. Whatever the case, after a good deal of discussion within the department, the contents of Clark's lengthy despatch on the crisis were considered so sensitive that distribution was restricted to just the War Cabinet.[122] And, even then, there was no reference made to the full extent of discussions that had taken place involving the British High Commissioner during the crucial days. Nor for that matter

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[117] Minute by Price, 7 October 1939, DO35/543/28/48; Clark to DO, 4 September 1939, DO35/543/28/48; Clark to Harding, 5 September 1939, DO35/543/28/49; 'Memorandum of Events, September 1939', Duncan Papers (BC294.A27)

[118] Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939, DO35/1003/4/1, particularly p.12, 'Implications of a conversation of 4 September with Pocock'; Clark to Harding, 5 September 1939, DO35/543/49

[119] Diary, 8 September 1939, Inskip Papers

[120] DO to Clark, 6 September 1939, DO35/543/28/63

[121] Minute by Hadow, 7 September 1939, FO371/23964

[122] Ibid., Clark to Eden, 13 September 1939; minute by Price, 7 October 1939; minute by Eden, 24 October 1939, DO35/1003/3/4/1

was reference made subsequently in 1940, in Clark's official report on his period in the Union.[123]

With the benefit of more detailed information since made available it seems fair to conclude that the DO, through its representative *in situ*, in fact played a pivotal role in helping ensure Smuts prevailed during the South African crisis. Certainly arguments in the country's parliament over the allegedly unconstitutional nature of the Governor-General's actions would rage for many months. They would also be one of the incidents specifically pointed to by the Nationalists during their campaign for power, one that ultimately proved successful in the immediate post-war period.[124]

It had been a close thing though, even Clark himself having little choice other than to admit to London, whilst waiting for the debate to begin, that he could only hope Duncan would 'stand firm, accept [Hertzog's] resignation and invite Smuts to form a government'.[125] And, as one of those who was a key participant in the debate in the South African parliament later pointed out, if the Union's prime minister had approached the Governor-General the evening before the debate began to inform him that his Cabinet was irreparably split and requested a dissolution, there was little that Duncan could then have done to refuse him.[126] Whilst Clark had made the fullest use of all his experience, the conclusion must be that Imperial unity was held together as much by Hertzog's over-confidence and the keen eyes of an unknown legal adviser who spotted that the Senate was out of time as by anything else. The value of moral ties which has long been championed as having had a vital role to play was in fact only of limited use in the highly charged atmosphere which prevailed.[127]

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[123] William Clark, *Race Relations and Political trends in the Union of South Africa, 1935-1940*, Official Paper Dominions No.192, Clark Papers (University of Cape Town)

[124] Minute by Hadow, 8 September 1939, FO371/23964; Harding to Eden, 11 March 1940, DO35/539/70/1/3; Harding to Eden, 16 April 1940, DO35/539/70/1/5; see Shula Marks, 'Southern Africa' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, pp.554-567

[125] Clark to DO, 4 September 1939, DO35/543/28/48

[126] Nicholls, *South Africa in My Time*, pp.344-345

[127] A.P.Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies* (London: 1959) p.323

There was however much to be gained by the DO from the experience, particularly in terms of it gaining an indication of what might be expected in the months to come. For Harding, who was shortly to leave for the Union, 'the last weeks of crisis...were a bit of a nightmare'.[128] Whilst recognising the overwhelming advantage that Smuts' full support had brought, it nonetheless appeared that he was generally pleased at how the situation had been handled, particularly the outcome.[129] His departmental colleagues did not have long though to reflect on any lessons they may have learned as there was now an urgent new challenge to be faced.

[128] Harding to Batterbee, 21 October 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[129] Ibid., Batterbee to Campbell, 8 September 1939 (Box 6/2)

CHAPTER THREE

Negotiating the Empire Air Training Scheme

(September 1939 – January 1940)

Initial Approaches from the Dominions

Organising and managing the peculiar requirements of coalition warfare now became the immediate preoccupation of a department which had not existed twenty-five years earlier when the European powers had last fought one another. With the formal agreement of a new, more official system of High Commissioners' meetings even before the formalities of the declaration had been completed, it was clear though that it would be a keenly embraced undertaking.[1] The Dominion governments were themselves also not lacking in enthusiasm as they quickly approached the British government for guidance upon how they might best develop upon their already adopted military preparations.[2] With South Africa's level of involvement at this time still considered too uncertain to gauge, the response of the Chiefs of Staff to the latter's enquiries was to order the readying of three separate papers outlining areas in which the British authorities would be grateful for assistance. Amongst the most pressing points put forward however was one which had already caused the DO considerable concern during the months immediately prior to the outbreak of war.[3] The repeated assessment was given by Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall, Chief of the Air Staff, that, 'should intensive air operations develop in Western Europe', a shortage of pilots and aircrew might arise.[4] In order to help remedy this he hoped that the Dominions would agree to host training programmes to provide a pool of personnel for Royal Air Force (RAF) service.

As far back as the 1926 Imperial Conference, William Mackenzie King, the Canadian prime minister, had suggested that Ottawa and London might co-operate on the creation of a reserve of airmen. Both sides however approached the matter with little

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[1] 'First Meeting between the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and the Dominion High Commissioners', 1 September 1939, DO121/6

[2] 'Action taken by the Dominions', 6 September 1939, WP(R)(39)5, CAB67/1; Campbell to DO, 20 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/1/2; Whiskard to DO, 12 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/2/3

[3] See William Stevenson, *The Origins of the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme from 1923 to December 1939* (University of London: 1981) unpublished manuscript; F.J.Hatch, *The Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, 1939-45* (Ottawa: 1983) pp.1-12; W.A.B.Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Vol.II* (Ottawa: 1986) pp.200-204

[4] 'Canadian Co-operation-Report by Chiefs of Staff Committee', 4 September 1939, WP(39)4, CAB66/1

real sense of urgency and tangible interest in the idea of carrying out air training only really re-emerged in the late 1930s. In May 1938 an air mission headed by the British industrialist J.G.Weir was despatched to Ottawa, its mission to evaluate the Dominion's aircraft manufacturing potential. Two months later Weir was followed by Group Captain J.M.Robb, the commandant of the Central Flying School of the RAF, who arrived in Canada having formed the impression that he was there to work out a scheme for instituting formal training facilities in the country. This, apparently, was a view also commonly held throughout a good part of the British Air Ministry.[5] It was a mistaken one though, the British representative finding his trip restricted by his hosts solely to discussions of future requirements. Indeed, by the outbreak of war not a single British aircrew member had been dispatched for training in Canada.

Responsibility for the misunderstanding lay almost entirely with Mackenzie King, a skilled politician with an often complex character whose actions consistently claimed to be 'primarily concerned to avoid any embarrassing centralisation or anything that would involve Canada in commitments'. As the dominant political figure in a country made up of two quite individual groups, one English-speaking, the other French, he was moreover consummate at being able to claim that he put everybody's best interests to the fore whenever possible.[6] In terms of his dealings with the British government, this led to him being thought of by many within Whitehall as something of a renegade who kept civil servants and ministers alike guessing as to his real intentions. In one of the first reports sent home by the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, shortly after his appointment in October 1938, Sir Gerald Campbell had starkly warned that the Canadian prime minister was 'if anything, less disposed to cooperate with other countries in the defence of democracy than is the Government of the United States'.[7] And in his almost point-blank refusal to accept any suggestion of an aircrew training scheme which, in his view, encroached on Canada's autonomy, the difficulties in dealing with him were all too evident.

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[5] 'Summary of Plan for Training of Pilots for Royal Air Force in Canada', 2 September 1938, AIR20/434

[6] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.138

[7] Campbell to DO, 24 March 1939, FO800/310

Fuelling Mackenzie King's fears, the Air Ministry managed its dealings with him in a poor manner, maintaining a generally aggressive line that was both heavy-handed and antagonistic. This allowed the prime minister in Ottawa to claim that London was attempting to undermine his authority. This was clear displayed with the April 1939 agreement to train just fifty British pilots per year in Canada. Only following pressure from its colleagues in the DO who, with their briefings from Campbell, were increasingly wary of the prickly Canadian, was this reluctantly accepted by the Ministry. But as the European situation deteriorated throughout the summer of 1939, the case for some form of Dominions' air training scheme became progressively more urgent. As a consequence, by August, an apparently already exasperated Neville Chamberlain wondered whether he ought to make direct representations to his Canadian counterpart. He could find little support for this idea though, his Cabinet Secretary doubting 'whether it is wise for you to do so, at any rate just now'.[8] Sir Horace Wilson, who was held in considerable regard by the prime minister, based his concerns not just on doubts about Mackenzie King's character.[9] He was also preoccupied with the financial costs of such a scheme while, along with the Cabinet Office, the confusing technical issues involved caused concerns; trainees would use American machines and not the British aircraft they would finally be called upon to fly.

Nonetheless, as was to continue to be the case during the subsequent negotiations which followed throughout the Autumn months of 1939, the Air Ministry's fervour for the idea outweighed any diffidence.[10] For the 'Empire Air Training Scheme', as the proposed project had been christened, to have any chance of success, Canada's participation was essential, not least because it alone of the Dominions would be able to provide access to the modern types of American aircraft that would be needed.[11]

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[8] Wilson to Chamberlain, 2 August 1939, PREM1/397

[9] See John Rimington, '"The New Wolsey": Sir Horace Wilson and the Appeasement of Hitler', The Source Public Management Journal (August 2000), pp.1-3

[10] The scheme is referred to under a number of different guises but this is the official British title as used in Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-52*; in Canadian texts it is more commonly referred to as the 'British Commonwealth Air Training Plan' (BCATP)

[11] See John Golley, *Aircrew Unlimited* (London: 1993) pp.40-57; Spencer Dunmore, *Wings for Victory* (Toronto: 1994) pp.33-47; C.P.Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict, 1921-48* (Toronto: 1981) pp.292-4; J.Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada* (Toronto: 1965) pp.103-114; Desmond Morton, *Canada and the War* (Toronto: 1981) pp.105-106; J.W. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record:*

The persistent failure to take heed of any of the DO's warnings which they had long-circulated about the difficult character of Canada's dominant political figure was therefore unfortunate and ensured that the Air Ministry's strategy was fatally weakened from the outset.

The Office was only too aware of the dangers this miscalculation threatened but at this stage, and from its still relatively junior position, it apparently felt able to do little to influence policy. This certainly seemed to be the case with the response to a further enquiry from the Air Ministry just three weeks before the German attack on Poland. Having only recently completed preparing the memorandum on the 'Position of the Dominions in the Event of War', the advice from Charles Dixon was that the situation in Ottawa meant it seemed 'certain that the only answer we should get would be refusal [so] it is useless to pursue the matter'.[12] This view, he went on to add, was not just his but also that held both by Campbell and his Secretary of State, Sir Thomas Inskip. The clear inference of this latter comment was that, to take the idea any further, the Air Ministry would be obliged to raise it directly at ministerial level. But, before any inter-department dispute could arise, Chamberlain's announcement that Britain was once again at war with Germany decisively tipped the balance. Thus, the DO would have the Chief of the Air Staff to thank for its first major wartime test, one which would ultimately provide a sharp examination for a still relatively inexperienced department.[13] For in the negotiations which followed, a situation developed which threatened not just the unity of the coalition which had begun to form in defiance of Nazi Germany, but also future relations within the Empire itself.

The Outbreak of War

For the DO, as with every other department within Whitehall, the first week of September 1939 was a tumultuous, often hectic one. The prime minister's announcement of a new war cabinet, one which he intended would deal with both the

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Volume 1, 1939-44 (Toronto: 1960) pp.40-59; J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War* (Toronto: 1975) pp.43-66; Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road* (Toronto: 1976) pp.4-7; Ted Barris, *Behind the Glory* (Toronto: 1992) pp.12-16

[12] Dixon to Abraham, 10 August 1939, PREM1/397; Garner, The *Commonwealth Office*, p.34

[13] 'Memorandum on the Possibility of Increasing Training in Canada for the Royal Air Force', 2 Sept 1939, AIR2/3206

challenges that the war would bring and, he hoped, help pacify at least some of the mounting concerns of a number of his colleagues, brought with it a new Secretary of State.[14] Having sat on the back-benches since his resignation as Foreign Secretary the previous year, Anthony Eden was now asked by the prime minister to accept what was still widely held to be a junior post and, in what was subsequently seen as a somewhat surprising move, he accepted.[15] Although his position did not warrant a permanent seat in the War Cabinet, it was announced that Eden would attend the majority of meetings of the 'inner sanctum' so he could ensure that the Dominions were properly supplied with information'.[16] This was no doubt, in part, intended to deal with the warnings which were circulating that to not do so would be 'a political mistake of the first order'.[17] Whatever the case, with the inevitable disruption caused by a Ministerial change and arrangements for the Dominions' entry into the war still being finalised, it would therefore be some days before the DO could hold further, more formal discussions about the air training proposal.

The Cabinet Office wasted little time though in pressing forward, Chamberlain exchanging preliminary telegrams with Mackenzie King on the subject even before Canada had officially confirmed its entry in to the war.[18] As this was taking place two senior London-based members of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), Wing Commander H.V.Heakes and Group Captain A.E.Godfrey, were invited to meet privately with Air Vice-Marshal Charles Portal, then in charge of Royal Air Force (RAF) personnel.[19] During the course of their discussions, Portal offered a sombre assessment of the possible developments that the Air Ministry viewed might take place in the future. In light of these, and in line with the Chief of the Air Staff's recent report to the cabinet, it was suggested that the major assistance the Dominions could offer, and

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[14] See Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came* (London: 1989) pp.601-604; Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp.337-342

[15] See Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: Volume III, The Reckoning* (London: 1965) pp.62-68; V.Rothwell, *Anthony Eden: A Political Biography* (London: 1992) p.51; David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Biography* (London: 1981) pp.151-153

[16] War Cabinet Meeting 7(39), 12 September 1939, CAB65/1 (hereafter 'WM')

[17] Yates to Tucker, 3 September 1939, PREM1/384

[18] Chamberlain to Mackenzie King, 6 September 1939 in D.R.Murray (ed.), *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Vol.VII/1 (1939-41)* (Ottawa: 1974) pp.1301-1302 (hereafter 'DCER VII/1')

[19] 'Minutes of a meeting to discuss flying training organisation', 10 September 1939, AIR20/331

Canada in particular, was to help rectify the RAF's current manpower shortages.[20] It seems reasonable to conclude Portal might have anticipated Heakes, who was an attaché based at Canada House, would sound out Massey, Canada's High Commissioner in London, about his ideas. Certainly within days the two RCAF officers, together with colleagues from the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), had taken action. This was to use the information they had received to secure the support of a couple of well-placed, but anonymous, imperial businessmen. As a result there was now an expanding group anxious that air training in the Dominions should be turned into something really 'impressive in its magnitude'.[21]

Along with Stanley Bruce, his Australian counterpart, Massey had particular reason to throw his weight behind the proposal. Passionate supporters of the imperial idea, both former Dominion prime ministers were men who still had a good deal of ambition and accompanying 'big agendas'.[22] But as High Commissioners the pair had found themselves increasingly marginalised by their respective home leaderships. Mackenzie King was widely rumoured not to trust his London representative because 'his telegrams were too English'.[23] With Bruce similarly dismissed, but for different reasons, this left the two men with only marginal influence in the political world. With the war only days old, the two aging politicians might therefore have viewed the air training proposals as something that could help re-establish them centre-stage in what already looked like being a long conflict.

Once approached Massey was certainly quick to respond. Both he and Bruce had only recently requested that the High Commissioners be granted a meeting with the War Cabinet to discuss 'the general political and military situation'.[24] Held on the evening of 13 September directly after they had been further briefed by their air force advisers, the two High Commissioners, escorted by Eden, took the opportunity to quiz the

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[20] Diary, 13 September 1939, Pearson Papers (MG26, N8,Vol.1-2)

[21] Diary, 14 September 1939, Massey Papers (Vol.40)

[22] Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne, Man of Two Worlds* (London: 1965) pp.277-280; Vincent Massey, *What's Past is Prologue* (Toronto: 1963) pp.303-306

[23] Diary, 29 October 1940, Waterson Papers

[24] 'Wartime Meetings between the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and the Dominion High Commissioners', 12 September 1939, DO121/6 (hereafter 'WHC')

assembled cabinet ministers on the true state of Britain's military position. After the meeting had finished Lord Chatfield, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, was bitterly critical about Bruce's use of 'hole-in-the-corner' methods to obtain information. Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, privately noted that the Dominion representatives 'had taken an unwarrantable, gloomy view of the situation...based on misleading information which they had received from certain Dominion officers on duty in this country'.[25] Little can the Chancellor have known though that the basis from which the comments had been drawn was actually a private briefing given by a senior British RAF official.

Indeed, despite conflicting claims as to who was responsible for first suggesting the scheme, it seems fairly clear that Massey and Bruce were in fact doing little more than develop an 'idea' supplied to them by Portal. Certainly neither of their memoirs makes prior mention of any deep-seated conviction that the Dominions held great potential as bases for carrying out training of air force personnel. They were however now anxious to put their own stamp on the scheme and a busy period followed during which the two High Commissioners sought to promote their ideas. Two days after they had clashed with the War Cabinet during a meeting hosted by Newall to 'discuss secret information regarding the RAF', the Chief of the Air Staff tried to persuade Massey and Bruce that what they had been told was inaccurate.[26] Neither seems to have been convinced and the next day, during the Secretary of State's daily meetings with the London-based Dominion representatives, they announced their conclusions to those present.[27]

For the DO, the endeavours of the two High Commissioners, the disturbance associated with an internal change of senior officials and the actual requirements of wartime, all combined to undermine its earlier resistance to the Air Ministry's

[25] Simon to Ismay, 15 September 1939, CAB104/247; Diary, 15 September 1939, Pearson Papers; Bruce and Simon did not in any case enjoy a harmonious relationship, 'Bruce gave me [Eden] a lift back to the office and on his way spoke in vehement condemnation of John Simon, at the Foreign Office, at the Home Office, and finally at the Treasury, his has been the greatest responsibility for the position in which we now find ourselves'; see Diary, 21 September 1939, Avon Papers (University of Birmingham) AP20/1/19; also see Bruce, 'Note on the Rt. Hon. Sir John Simon', Friday 13 October 1939, (National Archives of Australia) AA1969/275/1

[26] Diary, 16 September 1939, Pearson Papers

[27] Diary, 15 Sept 1939, Massey Papers; WHC, 16 September 1939, DO121/6

proposals. Indeed, the collapse in opposition was rapid and the DO's new Secretary of State, who had had some days to mull over what he had heard at the acrimonious War Cabinet meeting, was soon keen to push on with the enterprise. So much so that he now approached Sir Kingsley Wood, his counterpart in the Air Ministry, for guidance on how best to proceed.[28] Massey meanwhile continued to aid the process in whatever way he could, arranging a lunch meeting for Eden with a 'Canadian industrialist now in this country who was capable of undertaking the mass production of aeroplanes'.[29] With the Australian government having already indicated that they were willing to despatch trained personnel to form a Royal Air Force squadron, Eden's note to his diary, that the government should 'get ahead with this Canadian business as rapidly as possibly', was perhaps not surprising.[30] And with the War Cabinet's backing now secured, by the end of the week he was in fact ready to submit a draft telegram to Chamberlain intended for distribution to the Dominion governments. Mackenzie King's copy included a separate preface in the form of a personal message from the British leader to his Canadian counterpart, an addition Eden believed 'would help the chances of the scheme being sympathetically considered'. Chamberlain concurred but, being a busy man, he did not write the note himself, Massey, still happy to provide 'gratuitous advice on how to run the kingdom', once more stepping in.[31]

The document's despatch to Ottawa was good news for the Air Ministry but not for the DO for whom it meant the acceptance of a scheme which less than a month before it had dismissed as highly impractical.[32] Although the war had started in the meantime, the factors influencing its initial opposition had not substantially changed, most notably Mackenzie King's suspicions of London's motives. But faced with a resolute, well-organised campaign supported by a good deal of political guile, the department's junior standing had been ruthlessly exposed. At the same time there were doubts about the

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[28] Ibid., 19 September 1939

[29] Ibid., 20 September 1939

[30] Diary, 21 September 1939, Avon Papers; statement from Australia House, 20 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/31; DO to Whiskard, 29 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/36

[31] Eden to Chamberlain, 25 September 1939, PREM1/397; Diary, 25 & 29 September 1939, Massey Papers; Massey, *What's Past is Prologue*, p.303

[32] WHC, 26 September 1939, DO121/6; Diary, 26 September 1939, Mackenzie King Papers (MG26, J13)

loyalties of its senior figure. For Eden, who according to one of the DO's principals continued to 'excel on any occasions when he could bring his diplomatic skill and experience to bear', something of the potential scope of the air training scheme could well have been seen as a clear opportunity to begin restoring his credentials within Whitehall.[33] Aside from his obvious desire to promote any project which helped improve Britain's rearmament plans, such an assessment would certainly help account for some of his enthusiasm for the scheme. But as events would soon demonstrate, if it was political capital he was looking to gain, both he and his department would have nothing but hard work ahead of them.

The Air Mission

For Massey and Bruce, if they were to maintain the project's momentum, time was of the essence, leaving both men anxious that the Air Mission required to carry out the negotiations should leave for Ottawa by the end of the first week of October.[34] The news that the Canadian prime minister had telegraphed London to accept the proposal in principle and confirm that he would be 'pleased to play host to a conference to complete arrangements' was therefore well-received.[35] There were a number of reasons behind Mackenzie King ending his pre-war reluctance towards the training of airmen. Perhaps the most important of these was that with Canada now fully committed to supporting London in the war, this new proposal appeared to him to offer potentially far-reaching political rewards. Reducing the pressure for a large army, and thus avoiding any repetition of the divisive conscription crisis of more than twenty years before, support for the plan would allow him to demonstrate his balanced management of national affairs to the country's French-Canadians. And at the same time, because the British authorities had highlighted the vital importance they attached to the scheme, the ever-astute Mackenzie King was also well aware of the opportunities this might present.

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[33] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.94

[34] WHC, 30 September 1939, DO121/6

[35] King to Chamberlain, 28 September 1939, DCER VII/1, p.566; Diary, 28 September 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

With Ottawa's preliminary acceptance confirmed, the following day the Air Ministry was able to quickly move arrangements forward. Although it had been impossible to persuade Lord Trenchard to agree to become Director-General of 'the Imperial Air Training Scheme', the Air Ministry informed Chamberlain that they had instead secured the services of Lord Riverdale to lead the delegation.[36] An astute and successful Sheffield industrialist who had much experience of public affairs, these were the qualities which had led to Riverdale already having been appointed as an adviser to the government on the purchase of war materials. However, with a manner described variously as 'bluff', 'hearty yet domineering' and 'offhand yet commanding', along with a 'Colonel Blimp' moustache which enhanced the extremely British aspect of his appearance, it should have been clear that he was not the man for the particular task at hand.

Indeed, for the Canadian prime minister, and even more so for his Minister for External Affairs, O.D.Skelton, who remained bitterly opposed to greater co-operation with London, this English aristocrat came to personify everything they disliked most about the British Empire.[37] There is no evidence that the DO had even been consulted about the selection of personnel for the Air Mission although this was of little concern to Eden who, as quickly as he had offered his support for the scheme, now appeared to have lost all interest.[38] This ensured that during the crucial early phases of the plan, specifically choosing who was to be sent to Ottawa, there would be few opportunities for the department to make any meaningful contribution.

This failure to secure a more significant initial role was an oversight from which the DO would spend the next three months trying to recover. This started almost at once as Mackenzie King, confident that the British were now desperate for his support, made it clear that he was not about to accept any statement from London or its appointed agents, verbal or written, with which he did not agree. A proposed public announcement that the British government wished to make sparked the first problem. It was hoped to highlight to allies and enemies alike the existence of a far-reaching,

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[36] Trenchard to Chamberlain, 2 October 1939, PREM1/397; Air Ministry to Cabinet Office, 29 September 1939, PREM1/397

[37] Diary, 28 September 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[38] Diary, 4 October 1939, Avon Papers

almost finalised project, which had been suggested by representatives of the Dominions and demonstrated Imperial unity in action. This was not possible though for, as far as the Canadian prime minister was concerned, the air training proposal was a British idea which was still far from agreed and he duly protested at the proposed statement's tone. Revealing once again his ignorance of Mackenzie King, Kingsley Wood complained to his colleagues, by way of explanation, that he had first sought and gained the Dominion High Commissioners' approval prior to contacting Ottawa.[39] But due to the complicated nature of the relationship between Massey and Mackenzie King, Canada House's support for any scheme, in reality, counted for little.[40]

Standing up in front of the House of Commons to outline the 'contribution which the Dominions were making to the air effort', the Air Minister's often vague speech represented the first in what would be a long series of British retreats in the face of criticism from Ottawa.[41] And with Riverdale and his team still en route to Canada, their boat having set sail from Liverpool during the first week of October, the British government had already been given notice that trouble lay ahead.[42] The time taken up in settling this initial dispute did have some benefit for the DO however, galvanising Eden to break his ten-day lethargy and move more in step with the rest of his department.[43] But for those below him, the incident had ominous implications. Stephenson, already thought of as 'the ideal deputy at headquarters', reassured Sir Harry Batterbee that any difficulties he thought he might be experiencing in New Zealand over the proposed details for implementing air training 'cannot have been anything like the trouble we have had here'.[44] With the matter eventually resolved and

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[39] Diary, 11 October 1939, Cowell Papers

[40] Diary, 17 October 1939, Pearson Papers

[41] WM43(39), 10 October 1939, CAB65/1; Diary, 18 October 1939, Pearson Papers

[42] 'Mission to Canada in connection with the Dominion Air Training Scheme', AIR8/280; the team initially consisted of ten people, the Under-Secretary of State for Air arriving at a later date

[43] WM43(39), 10 October 1939, CAB65/1

[44] Campbell to Eden, 31 October 1939, DO35/1071/276/119; Stephenson to Batterbee, 11 October 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/4)

Hitler's conditional offer to end hostilities once again dominating the War Cabinet's attention, Riverdale and his Mission headed on for Canada.[45]

The British delegation had departed with little by way of an indication as to what, if any, their formal terms of reference would be other than that they were, in Riverdale's own words, 'to secure the agreement of the Dominion governments concerned as speedily as possible'.[46] The Air Mission's leader had not however been kept totally ignorant of the pertinent issues as, in a meeting held within the Air Ministry on the day before his departure, the significance of Britain's financial weakness had been fully impressed upon him.[47] This he now shared with the rest of his team, advising them whilst they were still at sea that money was the vital consideration when deciding upon the negotiating stance that should be adopted. This appears to have been the extent of the briefing though and although the basic proposals that were outlined by him to the Canadian government shortly after his arrival were quite comprehensive, no really substantive planning seems to have taken place beforehand.[48]

What would surely have been of even greater concern to the DO was the 'bottom-line' which Riverdale soon decided he would follow. The fact that the British government had not yet committed itself to future purchases of Canadian wheat might, he concluded, present an opportunity to 'make such a promise in order to facilitate acceptance'.[49] But the whole question of what to do with wheat, specifically Ottawa's

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[45] WM42(39), 9 October 1939 CAB65/1; ibid., WM43(39), 10 October 1939; WHC, 9 October 1939, DO121/6; ibid., WHC, 10 October 1939; Chamberlain to Canadian Government, 10 October 1939, DO114/113; Diary, 11October 1939, Avon Papers

[46] 'Mission to Canada', AIR8/280; Diary, 5 November 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[47] 'Memo on the Incidence of Cost of the Air Training Scheme', 5 October 1939, AIR19/83

[48] 'At a preliminary meeting on 16 October 1939, Riverdale outlined the basic proposal. It called for the training of 850 pilots, 510 air observers or navigators and 870 wireless operators/air gunners every four weeks or about 29,000 aircrew a year. Elementary flying schools would be established in each of the three Dominions [involved at this stage] but all advanced flying training as well as air observer and wireless operator/air gunner training was to be carried out in Canada. The North American training structure was to include twelve elementary flying schools, twenty-five advanced or service flying training schools, fifteen air observer schools fifteen bombing and gunnery schools, three air navigation schools and one large wireless or radio training school. To man these schools and their supporting organisation 54,000 air force personnel would be required. The number of training aircraft was estimated at five thousand'; Riverdale to Mackenzie King, 13 October 1939, DCER VII/1, pp.580-581

[49] 'Note of First Meeting', 10 October 1939, AIR20/405/IIIC/3/13

attempts to ensure that it secured a 'favourable' price for its sales, was deemed by the DO as being of the utmost sensitivity. Indeed, department-wide, in all the discussions that were then taking place, the need for very careful consideration of Canada's viewpoint was repeatedly stressed. At the same time the forthcoming meeting of Dominion ministers, scheduled to be held in London during November, was highlighted as the most opportune occasion to properly address the matter.[50] Riverdale was ignorant to this though whilst his own thoughts, equally, were unknown back at the Office.

One point upon which there was consensus between the two was the issue of the total proposed cost of the scheme. During the crossing the Air Mission chief had expressed his own doubts as to whether Canada could actually afford to train just under 30,000 aircrew each year. Upon his arrival in Ottawa he showed little hesitation in investigating this hypothesis, often by indiscreet quizzing of those who would later be involved in the negotiations.[51] The response was nearly always the same. One senior official in the RCAF, who had been asked for his views, noted that the scope of the British proposal was 'so far ahead of anything that we had thought of that everyone who had not heard details before was quite taken aback at its magnitude'.[52]

Entering his first meeting with Riverdale shortly after the Mission's arrival in mid-October, Mackenzie King had been fully briefed on rumours of these suggested costs by his Finance Minister, Colonel J.L.Ralston, another of his colleagues who was often critical of Britain. The Canadian prime minister had already been further annoyed by a press conference given by the Air Mission's chief earlier in the day. But it was Riverdale's weak performance during the actual meeting itself that did the most to compound his healthy suspicions that London was again trying to dictate policy to him.

Privately however, Mackenzie King felt that his sternness he had shown to Riverdale during the first meeting had led the British to recognise that he saw through them. As a result he was confident that they now knew what to expect during the soon-to-commence negotiations. In this, and in his flawed appraisal of the potential costs

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[50] 'Note of a Meeting....', 26 September 1939, DO35/1069

[51] 'Note of Third Meeting', 13 October 1939, AIR20/405/IIIC/3/13

[52] 'The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan', Air Vice Marshal Stedman Papers (Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa) DHist 80/412, p.2

entailed in the scheme, Mackenzie King was wrong.[53] But his was not the only inaccurate assessment that had been made. With some obvious relief Campbell had meanwhile updated the DO. Following the disastrous meeting and having listened to the High Commissioner's advice, he believed the Air Mission's head 'now saw the picture for himself [and] is going to tell the Air Ministry and the Treasury that he cannot put this proposal to [the Canadians]'.[54] The following day however, in his first progress report to be sent back to London, no copy of which the DO ever received, Riverdale failed to mention any need to change the plan.[55] Whilst Campbell had apparently badly misjudged the intentions of his new arrival, his deep-seated unease about what to expect from the negotiations remained as keen as ever.

As the Air Mission, aided by low-level members of the RCAF, looked at producing a more definite set of proposed costs, the High Commissioner sent London another long telegram. This highlighted the fact that the suggested outlay for the scheme was about 'twice the amount to be raised by taxation in Canada's war budget for the first year of the war'.[56] This warning further noted the degree to which the Canadian government was becoming agitated by its British counterpart's continuing perceived reticence in addressing its financial concerns. Riverdale's anticipated trump card was the most serious of these, the DO being warned that wheat had become a 'poisonous irritant' which, in Ottawa's view, could not be viewed separately from the air training question. Indeed it was now reported that the two issues were viewed as being 'intimately related in their mutual bearing on the question of what economic and financial effort Canada [could] actually make'. One final cause of worry for the High Commissioner was the condescending attitude of certain British officials who were felt to be 'working overtime to produce an unwholesome atmosphere over here, and to weaken, nay almost kill, the spirit of co-operation which was alive in the early days'.[57] The Ministry of Food, for one, seems to have often treated their Canadian counterparts in an

[53] Diary, 17 October 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[54] Campbell to Machtig, 18 October 1939, DO35/1071/276/9

[55] Riverdale to Wood, 19 October 1939, AIR20/338; handwritten comment, 29 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/38

[56] Campbell to Machtig, 24 October 1939, DO35/1028/276/16

[57] Campbell to Secretary of State, 27 October 1939, DO35/1071/276/15; ibid., Campbell to Machtig, 18 October 1939, DO35/1071/276/9; Campbell to Machtig, 9 November 1939, DO35/1012/276/119

arrogant manner throughout this period, while the British Purchasing Mission, then in Ottawa to discuss future Anglo-Canadian trade, was also guilty of adopting a sometimes haughty manner.[58]

The tensions reported by Campbell did not however appear to be dampening Riverdale's spirits. In the relatively short space of time since his arrival and despite his clash with Mackenzie King, the leader of the Air Mission had grown increasingly confident. He felt sure that the will of the Canadian people, which was without doubt broadly in favour of the training scheme, would prove decisive in helping to carry the day. The first official meeting between the British government's representatives and the Canadian war cabinet had been delayed by Mackenzie King who had been distracted by potentially divisive elections in Quebec. On the eve of the rescheduled discussions, Riverdale still felt sufficiently confident to be able to write positively to the Air Ministry. This time he informed them that, although he was generally disappointed with the Canadian prime minister holding back the enthusiasm of the population at large, 'you may rely upon us to do the best we can with [him] as we find him'.[59] Entering the talks with such an outlook, it is little wonder that what happened next came as a very great shock to the British industrialist.[60]

The Beginning of Negotiations

The first formal meeting between the two sides was nothing short of disastrous, a failure for which both had to accept some share of responsibility. The Canadian leader had forbidden any prior official contact, his apparent wish being to emphasise that it was an entirely British-inspired plan. This however meant that when it was announced by the Air Mission, in a 'sort of taken-for-granted way', that Canada would be expected to provide C$374 million towards the cost of the scheme, Ralston promptly 'exploded'.[61] According to Campbell, attending as the DO's observer, 'this put

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[58] Ministry of Food to Price, 30 October 1939, CAB21/490; 'Memorandum prepared by Grant Dexter', 30 November 1939, Pearson Papers

[59] Riverdale to Wood, 30 October 1939, DO35/1071/276/37

[60] Diary, 5 November 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[61] Campbell to Machtig, 9 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/119; 'Dominion Air Training Scheme', WP(G)(39)105, November 1939, CAB21/499

Riverdale off his balance and the rest of his presentation was not so good as it should have been'. The furious Mackenzie King, whose comments left Riverdale 'visibly deflated' was now firmly convinced that the proposals in front of him were nothing more than 'a recruiting scheme for the British air force rather than any genuine attempt for co-operation'.[62]

Back in London, looking over the High Commissioner's detailed report, there was only a sense of resignation amongst the department's senior officials over this most recent turn of events. For Machtig, who had replaced Harding as the department's official head, although developments were far from encouraging, he 'had not...expected anything very different', a view shared by his Secretary of State who found it all 'disappointing'. The immediate conclusion of the two men was that a compromise would have to be reached with Britain increasing its contribution to the scheme or reducing the scale of the plan in some way. In the meantime, although there was felt to be little that the DO could do at this stage, Stephenson suggested that it might be prudent if copies of all correspondence were now sent to Chamberlain.[63]

If Campbell's assessment had produced a certain air of pessimism in the office, much worse was to come. The High Commissioner had diligently noted Mackenzie King's harangue of the Air Mission and, in particular, his use of the expression 'this is not our war'.[64] Whilst later reports by the DO would point to such language as a clear demonstration of the reluctance which existed across the Atlantic, the FO's reaction at the time was more muted as it was well recognised that the Canadian prime minister was prone to 'woolly outbursts'.[65] But, for reasons best known to himself, Campbell decided that it would be appropriate in this instance to convey his shock at the statement to Skelton, advising him that the comments had been repeated back to London. Never one to overlook an opportunity that might strengthen support for his anti-British sentiment, having 'wisely written out some of the things said to him', the

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[62] Diary, 31 October 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[63] Ibid., Campbell to Secretary of State, 31 October 1939; minutes by Machtig, Eden, Stephenson, 2 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/7

[64] Campbell to Secretary of State, 1 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/10

[65] Minute by Cavendish Bentinck, 13 October 1939, FO371/23966; 'Notes by Liesching', 23 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/34

Minister for External Affairs dutifully reported this conversation back to his prime minster.[66] The rupture this caused in the relationship between Mackenzie King and Campbell lasted well beyond the negotiations' end and on into the following year.[67]

The Canadian leader's almost immediate response was to launch an astonishing attack on the DO's sole representative in the negotiations, even going so far as to approach the Governor-General, Lord Tweedsmuir, to urge that a formal rebuke be issued to the High Commissioner.[68] He also seized the opportunity to contact Chamberlain in person, not just to raise his personal grievances, but to formally warn him in writing of his conviction that military and economic questions in this war 'were inextricably intertwined and [could] not be dealt with separately'.[69] This was unfortunate timing as the visit by leading Dominion ministers to Britain was now under way, making the department's workload so hectic as to leave certain of its members uncertain whether they would get home from the office or not at the end of the day. The general reaction within the DO to this added complication in Ottawa was therefore one of dismay.[70] And with discussions in London having in fact become increasingly bitter and hard-fought, like 'some suburban county council discussing the rates' according to one of the delegates, Mackenzie King's very public complaints only contributed to the hardening of attitudes which had become visible within parts of Whitehall.[71]

Against this gloomy backdrop the arrival of the southern Dominions' representatives in Ottawa in early November, perhaps unsurprisingly, seemed to give Campbell cause to speculate that the clouds that had accompanied 'the joys and sorrows of the Riverdale Mission', were finally beginning to lift.[72] This assessment was to prove far from

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[66] Diary, 1 November 1939, Mackenzie King Papers ; ibid., 5 November 1939

[67] Campbell to Machtig, 27 February 1940, DO35/1072/276/124

[68] Tweedsmuir to Chamberlain, 2 November 1939, Neville Chamberlain Papers (University of Birmingham), NC7/11/32, No.290; see John Cowan, *Canada's Governor-Generals 1867-1952* (Toronto: 1952) pp.151-160

[69] Mackenzie King to Chamberlain, 3 November 1939, DCER VII/1, p.1374

[70] Liesching to Batterbee, 3 November 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/6)

[71] Dunnett (Treasury) to Hutton (Ministry of Food), 7 November 1939, CAB21/490; Reitz, *No Outspan*, p.248

[72] Campbell to Machtig, 9 November 1939, DO35/1012/276/119

accurate though as the arrival of the delegations from Australia and New Zealand in fact precipitated the onset of even greater troubles. Both potential partners wanted to carry out more aircrew training in their own countries, the most simple reason for this being fiscal considerations. Neither enjoyed particularly enviable economic positions, New Zealand's being by far the worse of the two.[73] The Air Mission was sympathetic to the arguments both countries advanced and consequently informed the Canadian government that changes in the financial calculations would accordingly need to be made.[74] As a result during the following week the shape and costs of the scheme changed time and time again. Finally, by the month's midpoint the Canadian cabinet was willing to accept a revised plan calling for it to contribute a total of C$313 million. Although he had gone further than he had originally wished, Mackenzie King felt this was merited so that the British government might feel its counterpart in Ottawa had acted generously.[75]

His support was however conditional and the two points upon which the Canadian leader required agreement were crucial. A guarantee of acceptance by London that the scheme took priority in terms of Canada's contribution to the war effort was concerned was the first point. The other was a satisfactory conclusion to the Anglo-Dominion discussions. Together these would both provide potentially great political benefits for Mackenzie King.[76] But, in Whitehall, there were those who were already suspicious of the Dominions' commitment to the war and these caveats appeared to confirm their doubts. The foreign secretary for one had already been quick to inform Eden of a complaint made by the Canadian minister in Washington. This had stated that volunteers at home had been told they were not immediately required and 'no stirring appeal had been made to deeper Canadian feeling that wished to be convinced that it was engaged upon a holy war'.[77] During war cabinet meetings in October, at which

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[73] DO to Whiskard, 25 October 1939, DO35/1003/3/2/19; memorandum on New Zealand by Bewley, October 1939, CAB21/490

[74] 'Mission to Canada', pp.6-7, AIR8/280

[75] Diary, 14 November 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[76] For a contemporary discussion of Canadian commercial considerations see J.C.Kirkwood, 'The War and Business', The Quarterly Review of Commerce, Number VII (Autumn 1939)

[77] Note of comments made by Herridge, Canadian minister in Washington, 30 October 1939, FO371/23966

Eden had first pointed to Mackenzie King's manoeuvrings, both Leslie Hore-Belisha, Secretary of State for War, and Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, had expressed concerns over the lack of speed with which 'overseas contingents' were reaching Europe.[78] Kingsley Wood now also privately took the opportunity to outline his anxieties although, having advised Riverdale that he felt the provisional agreement was 'a reasonable solution of a very difficult problem', he ultimately settled upon the same conclusion for his cabinet colleagues.[79]

The Treasury however had no intentions of being so compliant. Having had a chance to consider the 'extraordinary variety of telegrams, memoranda and so forth' that the matter had generated, and to assess the calculations of their Canadian counterparts, they would not countenance accepting the agreement in its new proposed form. Indeed their discouraging summary, that 'the whole thing seems to us mildly preposterous', was one which the Exchequer intended not to reconsider until after it had had an opportunity to discuss the many concerns which it held directly with the Canadian delegation visiting London.[80] This was in some ways not a bad turn of events for the DO as it provided the department with a breathing space to take stock of the situation. The Dominion ministers' visit had clearly been a trying experience, according to Machtig he had 'never known anything like it', both in terms of the hours being worked and also the intensity of the activities being undertaken.[81] During the first three weeks of November virtually every day had been fully occupied either with meetings or official functions. Eden meanwhile had been away from the Office for six days escorting the visiting ministers to France, from which many of them returned 'very dissatisfied' with the defences they had seen, and his absence further contributed to the workload of his senior colleagues.[82] So much so that attention to the training scheme apparently waned during these weeks, as the relative absence of internal minutes on the Ottawa negotiations subject reveals.

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[78] WM43(39), 10 October 1939, CAB65/1; ibid., WM53(39), 19 October 1939

[79] Memoranda, WG105(39), 18 November 1939, CAB67/2; Wood to Riverdale, 22 November 1939 DO35/1071/276/38

[80] 'Treasury Note', 20 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/31

[81] Machtig to Batterbee, 19 November 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/2)

[82] Carl Berendsen, *Reminiscences of an Ambassador* (unpublished manuscript), Berendsen Papers (Victoria University Library, Wellington) Volume 2, Chapter 14, p.1

An unforseen consequence of the Treasury's increasingly belligerent stance was an acceptance within the DO that the economic question was the key aspect of discussions. This allowed departmental responsibility for the matter to be effectively turned over to Liesching who had just recently been promoted to AUS. During his career thus far he had prospered through his involvement in the establishment of the British High Commissions in Canada, Australia and South Africa, and with 'a charming personality [and] broad outlook' his success had apparently endeared him to the more senior members of the department.[83] His first fourteen-page memorandum, intended for circulation throughout Whitehall, fully assessed the Anglo-Canadian economic relationship, covering every aspect of the issue. In so doing it delivered a stark series of conclusions the most fundamental of which warned that so long as no agreement was reached about the financial relationship, no settlement of the Air Training Scheme negotiations could hope to be found. Indeed, in Liesching's view, 'if the present feeling against our wheat purchasing policy is not allayed, it may recoil upon us to our disadvantage in the future'.[84] Whilst the document offered no definitive answers at this stage, it was nonetheless a most valuable exercise, helping restore a sense of focus and urgency within the DO if nowhere else. And with the talks resuming again in Ottawa, renewed interest could not have come at a better time as an apparently pivotal moment now faced the Air Mission.

The Draft Memorandum

For the Australian and New Zealand representatives, some of whom had found their visit to Canada far from enjoyable, the point had arrived where they were no longer willing to consider extending their stay. Upon their arrival in Ottawa Mackenzie King had told them that they had come not as his guests, but as members of the Riverdale Mission. Indeed the Canadian authorities had made little effort to hide the fact that their Dominion cousins were held to be of a second-class in terms of the significance attached to them. According to the British High Commissioner, this reception had so angered Jim Fairburn, the Australian Minister for Air, that 'he had a hard time controlling his anger...and had made up his mind to get the Australian part of the

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[83] G.H.Meadmore to Batterbee, 29 November 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 8/4); ibid., Harding to Batterbee, 18 February 1939

[84] 'Notes on Canada's War Economy', prepared by Liesching, 23 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/34, original in DO35/1071/15/31 (unavailable)

scheme mapped out as quickly as possible and then leave'.[85] Little wonder that the latter might have consequently chosen to adopt a 'home by Christmas attitude' to the proceedings.[86] But just as the Air Mission was telling London there was an urgent requirement to sign some form of document before the representatives from the southern Dominions left, Kingsley Wood's memorandum came before the War Cabinet. The discussion that followed quite clearly demonstrated that Eden had not grasped the implications contained within Liesching's memorandum. Instead the Secretary of State still based his entire outlook solely on his suspicions of Mackenzie King and this ensured that he continued only to recommend that a firm line be taken. Although the War Cabinet chose to ignore this advice, this came at a time when comments being made elsewhere by the Secretary of State suggested that he had once more adopted a noncommittal attitude towards the entire affair.

This was particularly unfortunate in light of the actions of Captain Harold Balfour, Under-Secretary of State for Air, who had been sent out to Ottawa at the end of October to lend his political assistance to the Air Mission. Acting on his own authority he had given a guarantee to the Canadian government that C$4.5 million, which they agreed to advance to an American manufacturer of training aircraft, would be paid back at once by the British Treasury. When the DO finally heard, a fortnight afterwards, Machtig and Eden were both shocked, speculating as to what effect this would have upon the Canadians. Later however the Secretary of State thought 'it was none of his business' although it is unclear whether he was referring to Balfour's actions or to the Air Ministry's handling of the Air Mission as a whole.[87] One of the DO's junior officials would later write of Eden that he 'exuded an impression of superficiality with no profound interest in the problems of the Commonwealth', an assessment that certainly seemed to be true on this occasion.[88] In the meantime Liesching had meanwhile taken the opportunity to distribute a second internal memorandum within the DO, providing an exhaustive summary of events to date for

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[85] Campbell to Batterbee, 8 February 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/2)

[86] Certainly the Australian representative was angered: 'I gave a lunch for Fairburn...it is evident that he was not pleased with his reception in Canada', Diary, 12 December 1939, Avon Papers

[87] Minute by Machtig, 24 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/49; ibid., minute by Eden, 27 November 1939

[88] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.46

his peers.[89] This was the first document of its kind prepared during the negotiations, and was another useful aid that would have proven useful much earlier. Eden did not look at it until the month's end however by which time the situation had taken another turn for the worse.

The telegram sent by the War Cabinet to Mackenzie King in the hope of reassuring him had, in fact, achieved the opposite effect, leaving him once again in a highly agitated state.[90] The point of contention for both sides was the British government's concern about any announcement describing the Air Training Scheme as Canada's principal war effort. The authorities in London feared that such a move would have 'embarrassing effects on relations with the French'.[91] The British Ambassador in Paris had been advising for some weeks of the growing unease surrounding him and his most recent message to Chamberlain warned that questions were being raised about his country's commitment to the war. Indeed it was even thought in certain French circles that the government in London was considering 'a peace which will contain what France would not consider adequate political and military guarantees against any further threat'.[92] Put in such a context, Mackenzie King's continuing attempts to limit Canada's military contribution provided another worrying distraction. And Gallic nervousness was not helped when, with the continuing failure to secure any consensus, the representatives of Australia and New Zealand left Ottawa having signed no more than a draft agreement, all that could be agreed upon by the respective sides.

Despite this potentially alarming lack of accord, Chamberlain and his cabinet were pleased at having secured what was felt to be a satisfactory announcement. At the same time it was believed that Mackenzie King now appeared satisfied with the assurances he had been given about the financial issues. A similarly optimistic outlook was held by Machtig who shared his belief with Eden that the worst had passed.[93] Reading through all the telegrams in his ground floor office in the DO, Liesching

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[89] 'Canadian Reservations...', prepared by Liesching, 26 November 1939 DO35/1071/276/41

[90] Mackenzie King to Chamberlain, 27 November 1939, DCER VII/1, p.1420

[91] WM96(39), 27 November 1939, CAB65/1

[92] Campbell (Paris) to FO, 25 November 1939, CAB21/952

[93] Machtig to Eden, 28 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/45

however thought differently about the situation in Ottawa. It was obvious to him that the Canadian prime minister, who he noted was still in a 'very vacillating mood', would categorically refuse to initial any formal agreement without the British agreeing to his demands that the Air Training Scheme should be regarded as Canada's 'preference of effort'.[94] Campbell, in the High Commission in Ottawa, also was far from convinced and the torrid verbal blast he had endured from Mackenzie King during a meeting in the last week of November no doubt strengthened his views. Recognising the delicate state of affairs which existed, he was therefore prepared to ignore yet another attack made against him by the Canadian leader, putting it down to the speed of negotiations and the accompanying 'jagged nerves and tempers'.[95] Mackenzie King was in fact becoming increasingly critical, in particular in his by now only thinly veiled public attacks upon the hoped for goals of the Air Mission and those people within its ranks.[96]

With the start of a new month however, came the first indication that Liesching's memoranda might be beginning to have some impact on his Secretary of State's outlook. Following Mackenzie King's most recently dismissive reply to Chamberlain, Kingsley Wood had volunteered to assist Eden in devising some suggestions for a suitable reply. Sitting down to discuss these the latter, who only the day before had been presented with his AUS's recommendations, now entirely altered his point of view. As a result the suggested reply which was put forward showed no sign of his previous intransigence.[97] With the War Cabinet's acceptance of this draft, it was accepted that Mackenzie King should be free, when the agreement was finally announced, to state that the British government considered the Air Training Scheme to represent Canada's most effective form of assistance.[98] For the Chancellor of the Exchequer, having only just concluded an acrimonious meeting with the Canadian delegation in London, this was a great disappointment although it had become clear, even to him, that 'there was no use attempting to force the Canadians to accept a

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[94]'Canadian Reservations...', prepared by Liesching, 28 November 1939, DO35/1071/276/41

[95] Campbell to Machtig, 29 November 1939, DO35/1072/276/121

[96] 'Memorandum prepared by Grant Dexter', 30 November 1939, Pearson Papers

[97] WM98(39), 29 November 1939, CAB65/1; Air Ministry to Cabinet Office, 30 November 1939, PREM1/397

[98] WM100(39), 1 December 1939, CAB65/1

solution on other lines'.[99] As Liesching tried to settle on a final formula which would allow for an initialling by all sides, the Cabinet resignedly lamented the degree to which Mackenzie King had used the Air Training Scheme negotiations for his own political ends. The episode was still however not yet resolved as the Riverdale Mission found itself summoned back to the negotiating table once again.[100]

Addressing the 'Finer Details'

With the structure of the agreement appearing to have been settled almost entirely in Mackenzie King's favour, and the official document already having been printed on special paper ready for signing, the administration in Ottawa at the last moment found further cause for complaint. At the end of the first week of December Norman Rogers, the Canadian Minister of National Defence, raised with the question of the final designation of Canadian personnel graduating from the scheme. Specifically he referred to the proposed wording of Article 15 of the as yet unsigned 'Memorandum of Agreement'.[101] With no advice to the contrary from the Air Ministry, Riverdale had approached the negotiations from the outset believing that it was his 'endeavour to arrange that they [graduates] should be enlisted in the Royal Air Force'.[102] Such an idea was certainly in keeping with the operating experience of the last war. In this instance though the Canadian government wished that its graduates be organised in the field as fully homogeneous RCAF units and it was therefore now determined to press for more guarantees. This despite the fact that the final line of Article 15 had made it clear that this question would ultimately be resolved by inter-governmental discussions initiated subsequently by the British government.

According to Campbell the new delay instigated by the Defence Minister was nothing more than a provocation designed to ensure that Ottawa maintained the whip hand. The answer given by Riverdale was based upon the dangerous premises instilled in him

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[99] Ibid., WM101(39), 2 December 1939; 'Questions Relating', 1 December 1939, CAB21/490

[100] 'Canadian Government's Conditions', precis prepared by Liesching, 6 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/58; WM107(39), 7 December 1939, CAB65/1

[101] Campbell to Stephenson, 20 December 1939, DO35/539/70/1/1

[102] 'Office Memorandum', AIR8/280

in the Air Ministry in September before his departure.[103] For the Canadian leader however this 'evasive' reply was once more proof that the British government was trying to 'keep Canadian squadrons at its disposal'.[104] For London the renewed verbal offensive it provoked represented a grave turn of events. With the British government having already agreed that it would be responsible for the pay of graduates serving in Europe, the inference was that the British Exchequer would be expected to pay for the maintenance of entire RCAF units in the field. Once this principle was accepted, it could be anticipated that the other Dominions would themselves look to seek a similar agreement, leading not just to a potentially disastrous financial debate but also raising serious administrative and constitutional questions.

The British War Cabinet, which had clearly been shaken by Mackenzie King's earlier assaults, does not appear by this stage to have been prepared to engage in further struggles. And Eden, following his only recent, radical change of heart, offered a clear illustration of how little spirit remained as he urged the merits of the Canadian point of view upon his colleagues.[105] In Ottawa meanwhile, the British High Commissioner's evident sense of exasperation had turned into outright anger leaving him no longer willing to simply ignore Mackenzie King's actions. He thus challenged Rogers as to why it was deemed necessary to alter Article 15. The response given was that the Canadian government now wished inter-governmental discussions to include not just experts but statesmen as well. Having heard this Campbell's bitterness was obvious as he confided to his DO confidantes a belief that 'we shall have to comb the Empire for statesmen as I have not noticed any in Ottawa so far'.[106] His growing contempt for those he viewed as responsible for hi-jacking the negotiations for their own ends was all too apparent.

With Machtig's time taken up with the increasingly strenuous day-to-day running of the office, by this stage only Liesching can be said with any degree of confidence to have

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[103] Campbell to Machtig, 18 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/100

[104] Diary, 9 December 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[105] WM111(39), 11 December 1939, CAB65/1

[106] Campbell to Machtig, 12 December 1939, DO35/1072/276/123

maintained a clear grip on his emotions and a focus on the task in hand.[107] Indeed the carefully prepared telegram he now sent to Ottawa demonstrated that he, at least, had not given up hope of a settlement being reached.[108] At the heart of this lay the suggestion that before Canadian graduates could be identified as RCAF squadrons they would need to be supported by the requisite number of Canadian ground crews, an idea which was even accepted by the RCAF itself. Though he privately admitted to Campbell his ignorance of the technical considerations involved in the agreement, Mackenzie King nonetheless dismissed the idea out of hand.[109] Publicly he claimed this was because the Canadian government had always assumed that it would fall upon the RAF to provide the necessary ground personnel. It was clear though that the Canadian leader viewed the issue as an entirely political one and he was not prepared to settle for a solution which might be viewed by his domestic opponents as a compromise. Faced by this impasse, and with the Air Mission holding crisis discussions, both amongst themselves and with their Canadian counterparts, the situation Liesching had feared was upon the DO. There was virtually nothing the department could do, however, to bring any influence to bear upon the final outcome.

The Final Stages

The individual most qualified to deal with technical matters such as that involved in Article 15 was Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham. After a long and distinguished career, in 1937 Brooke-Popham had retired from the RAF and been appointed as Governor and Commander-in Chief of Kenya. Upon the outbreak of war, in September 1939 he had re-joined the RAF and shortly afterwards sailed with the Riverdale Mission to Ottawa. Despite his statesmanlike qualities, by the end of November Campbell had perceived that Brooke-Popham's subsequent role in the negotiations would be largely nonexistent.[110] His reasoning for this was that, practically from their first encounter, the Canadian prime minister had formed a poor opinion of

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[107] Minutes by Liesching, 12 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/82

[108] WM113(39), 13 December 1939, CAB65/1

[109] Campbell to Machtig, 20 December 1939, DO35/1072/276/124

[110] Campbell to Machtig, 29 November 1939, DO35/1072/276/121

the Air Chief Marshal, with his 'Englishman's tranquil, self-satisfied way'.[111] As the negotiations progressed the latter was increasingly held to be the leader of the 'technical men' who, along with the British war cabinet, were deemed most responsible for providing the greatest resistance to his wishes.[112] Mackenzie King therefore effectively chose to ignore him. Riverdale was viewed in an entirely different manner though and it was clear that the Canadian prime minister saw him as the weak link in the British delegation. As the person who he thought he could best intimidate, the relatively inexperienced Air Mission leader therefore became the principal focus of his attention. By this stage Mackenzie King was keen to push for a conclusion to the negotiations as he knew that his position was only good for a few more days. The First Canadian Division's arrival in Britain was imminent and throughout the negotiations he had hoped to announce the agreement of the Air Training Scheme beforehand so as to gain maximum publicity for his leadership skills.

The final negotiations that covered the weekend of 15-17 December were carried out by just a handful of men and have been comprehensively examined by two Canadian authors.[113] Scant mention is made however of a further development which, at the beginning of the weekend, threatened to upset all of Mackenzie King's plans, the premature broadcast of a statement by the Australian prime minister, Robert Menzies, another aggressive self-publicist. In referring to his country's participation in an 'agreed' Air Training Scheme, this placed a much greater sense of urgency upon the authorities in Ottawa to finalise the signing of an agreement. To not do so would doubtless lead to questions being raised domestically as to the cause of the delay. Nonetheless the Canadian prime minister remained uncompromising, decrying Menzies' broadcast as 'threatening the entire scheme [and] threatening good relations within the Commonwealth' and laying overall blame with the British Air Ministry who he claimed had authorised Canberra's actions. Riverdale at once contacted London to advise that,

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[111] Diary, 16 November 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[112] Minute by Arnold Heeney (King's Principal Secretary), 'Re: British Commonwealth Air Training Plan', 22 December 1939, DCER VII/1, pp.669-671

[113] Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, pp.50-59; Granatstein, *Canada's War*, pp.56-58

in his judgement, not to concede the point now ran the risk of a complete breakdown in negotiations.[114]

The DO, when it learned of Mackenzie King's assertion that Whitehall was responsible for Menzies' actions was aghast but, as was the case throughout the whole of this final weekend they did not find out about the allegation until after the event.[115] Indeed the increasingly frantic Riverdale restricted his telephone discussions principally to the Air Ministry. To them he urged that to save the Air Training Plan, Mackenzie King's objections about Article 15 had to be fully recognised. The War Cabinet would not accept this plea however instructing the Mission's leader to stand firm whilst reiterating to him their broad concerns about the financial requests being made to him.[116] This steadfastness only served to increase the Canadian prime minister's ire which was further fuelled by a comment of Brooke-Popham's which he overheard and construed, erroneously, as being derogatory about Canadian command qualities.[117] With the newfound British resolve unacceptable, Mackenzie King therefore returned to his attempts to isolate Riverdale. On Saturday, the penultimate day of negotiations, his efforts became all the greater in order that he might be able to announce the successful completion of the plan the next day. Aside from his political considerations, the Sunday was also his birthday, an important date for a spiritualist who, amongst other things, believed in the auspiciousness of events.[118]

By the afternoon, the Air Mission chief, now a visibly tired and broken man, had been badgered into accepting a formula which was effectively the same as the one rejected by the Air Ministry the previous evening. But by this stage neither Brooke-Popham nor Campbell, who fully accepted that he had been dismissed by the Canadian premier as 'an incorrigible obstructionist', would sign.[119] In his increasing desperation, the

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[114] Heeney, 'British Commonwealth Air Training Plan', DCER VII/1, p.667; Riverdale to Eden, 16 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/87

[115] Machtig to Eden, 19 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/99

[116] 'Note of a telephone conversation', 16 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/95

[117] Diary, 15 December 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[118] See Brian Nolan, *King's War, Mackenzie King and the Politics of War 1939-45* (Toronto: 1988); Norman Hillmer, '"The Outstanding Imperialist": Mackenzie King and the British' (Canada House Lecture Series), Number 4 (1978)

[119] Campbell to Stephenson, 20 December 1939, DO35/539/70/1/1

'explosive' Mackenzie King therefore resorted to once more imploring the, by now, dying Governor-General to assist him, asking that he send for Brooke-Popham and pressure him to remove his objections. This he agreed to do and in what Tweedsmuir's own secretary, himself a Canadian civil servant, later concluded 'was a successful attempt by the Government of one Dominion to use the Crown to score a point over another', the Air Mission's resistance was finally ended.[120]

Only Campbell still remained opposed to the Canadian leader's wishes although by this stage he had now been effectively sidelined. In fact during this final weekend contact between the two consisted solely of Mackenzie King 'venting all of his wrath' on the unfortunate High Commissioner.[121] After six weeks of intense negotiations, the final document was therefore signed by representatives of the Canadian government and the British Air Mission shortly after midnight on 17 December. Its contents were very different to those first envisaged by Riverdale during his October crossing. Broadly speaking the number of training schools were reduced by one-third and the number of aircraft required had been reduced to 3450, the bulk of which would be financed by the British government. With it being initially envisaged that the scheme would end on 31 March 1943 Canada agreed to pay C$287 million, nearly one-half of the estimated total costs.[122]

With certain of its sections still being hastily written only hours before the signing, the next day the telegram outlining what had been agreed reached the Air Ministry. To those who read it, it was obvious, as it had been to Campbell and Brooke-Popham, that Riverdale's revised formula was not actually that much of an improvement on earlier rejected versions. In fact the Air Ministry was so taken aback that there was uncertainty whether the War Cabinet would be able to accept the document as it stood. Stephenson, attending a meeting called by his Whitehall colleagues, warned against further rejection advising that to do so would have a serious psychological effect on Ottawa and probably lead to the cancellation of the entire scheme.[123] There

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[120] 'Memorandum prepared by Redfern', 29 December 1939, DO35/1071/70/1/2

[121] Campbell to Machtig, 18 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/100

[122] See Hatch, *The Aerodrome of Democracy*, pp.18-20

[123] Minute by Stephenson, 21 December 1939, DO35/1012/276/107

followed three telephone conversations between Machtig and Eden in Scotland, a meeting between the London departments involved and further direct consultation with Campbell and Riverdale before it was decided that the agreement would have to be left as it stood. The following day though Simon still felt sufficiently angered to point out that he had not sent any congratulatory telegram to Mackenzie King.[124] For Chamberlain, who had been in France during the weekend and was therefore entirely unaware of the last drama which had unfolded, the degree of bitterness apparent within the War Cabinet's discussions must have come as something of a shock.[125] Any confusion on his part though merely echoed that which appeared to have affected him throughout the Canadian-driven discussions. He had remained firmly on the periphery, perhaps in part as a result of his earlier experiences with the Dominion High Commissioners which had left him 'very upset'.[126]

The Lessons Learnt

For the DO, with negotiations at an end, it was time to assess an experience in which, although sometimes only involved at the fringes, it believed its role to have been a significant one. Aiding this process almost at once the reports of those involved in the negotiations started to arrive. From the Air Mission team, Riverdale's was actually the last one to be submitted, providing a detailed picture which was almost entirely 'technical' in its outlook.[127] Upon his return to London though he 'made no effort to conceal his dislike for Mr Mackenzie King'.[128] Brooke-Popham meanwhile, in a letter to the Secretary of State for Air written on the day of the agreement's conclusion, made a number of more interesting points. Amongst these was the degree of blame he attached to the Air Ministry for not having 'thrashed out proper terms of reference before the Mission left', and for the distress it subsequently incurred.[129]

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[124] WM118(39), 18 December 1939, CAB65/1

[125] Cabinet Office Minute, 29 December 1939, PREM1/397

[126] Diary, 11 October 1939, Avon Papers

[127] 'Mission to Canada', AIR8/280

[128] Diary, 7 February 1940, Pearson Papers

[129] Brooke-Popham to Kingsley Wood, 17 December 1939, Brooke-Popham Papers (Liddell Hart Archives, King's College, University of London) IV/2/15; ibid., chronology of period, 14-17 December 1939 (IV/1/98)

Campbell had proven extremely diligent with his despatches during the previous two months, already earning himself great praise for his 'most valuable work under conditions of much difficulty', and he also wasted little time in sending a comprehensive analysis of the affair to the DO.[130] His official despatch, written just two days after the signing of the agreement, provided a damning indictment of the behaviour of the Canadian government, specifically targetting Mackenzie King for special condemnation. In the High Commissioner's opinion the British government had been repeatedly bluffed and bullied and Ottawa's final refusal to sign, in particular, 'was not an issue, regardless of what Canadian government may have said, on which they would have been supported'.[131] With Campbell using the days that followed to supply a steady stream of information of events that he had been excluded from at the time, and about which the DO had no knowledge, those who read the reports were shocked by what they learned.

For Liesching, who had himself found the negotiations 'extremely difficult', the High Commissioner's obviously prolonged and bitter experiences more than accounted for his now only too apparent sense of exasperation.[132] For the more senior figures within the department the potential danger that the full story carried with it was clear, and great debate ensued over how widely it should be circulated within Whitehall. Ultimately it was decided that, aside from Downing Street's copy, only the Air Ministry would be permitted to read Campbell's words. Indeed in passing it on to Chamberlain, Eden warned the prime minister of its 'sharp and bitter tone', specifically highlighting the conclusion that 'we are not going to have a very easy job in keeping the present Canadian government in line and in good heart'. Having read it and already spoken with Riverdale, Chamberlain could do little other than agree.[133]

The affair was still not over, however, as on the day that Eden wrote to Chamberlain, a further supplementary despatch arrived from Ottawa. In it came a still more vivid

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[130] Minute by Machtig, 23 October 1939, DO35/1003/3/1/2

[131] Campbell to Machtig, 18 December 1939, DO35/1071/276/100; Campbell to Eden, 19 December 1939, DO35/1072/276/115

[132] Liesching to Batterbee, 24 December 1939, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/6); minute by Liesching, 10 January 1940, DO35/1072/276/115

[133] Ibid., minute by Eden, 13 January 1940, Eden to Chamberlain, 16 January 1940, Rucker to Archer, 17 January 1940

account of the Air Mission's final days and proof, as far as the DO was concerned, that 'the Canadian Prime Minister (sic) had been definitely offensive to the United Kingdom High Commissioner'.[134] There was also a renewed suggestion that Mackenzie King viewed the only proper channel of communication to be from prime minister to prime minister. In fact since shortly after his arrival in Ottawa, Campbell's telegrams had confirmed that Mackenzie King held Massey, his High Commissioner in London, with almost utter disdain; in August 1939, he had reported that he had been privately told his own position was similarly viewed.[135] Following his treatment during the final phases of the negotiations, he was now convinced that there was a distinct problem in terms of Anglo-Canadian communications.

Eden found this new report the most distasteful so far and finally resolved to do something, asking Machtig to write to Campbell and seek his advice upon how best he should proceed. His sense of disquiet was only increased by the almost immediate receipt of further documents showing how Mackenzie King had twice used the Governor-General to help secure his objectives and, in the second case, had implicitly threatened Tweedsmuir that a constitutional crisis was potentially in the offing.[136] In ordinary circumstances it is questionable what might have happened next. These were not ordinary times however, and as the weeks passed, the ardour of those involved rapidly diminished. By the end of February Campbell was willing to let the matter rest as he had ignored Mackenzie King for nearly two months and felt he had made his point. The DO was of a similar mind and, no doubt in recognition of the long war that lay ahead of them and a realisation of what a worsening argument might mean, Stephenson urged that the matter should be allowed to 'pass into oblivion as soon as possible'. Eden concurred, his attention now focussed on other matters and in the knowledge that Campbell was relatively happy and would shortly receive official recognition of his labours. Machtig had however had to talk him out of bringing the matter up again with Chamberlain one last time.[137] With this final note, the series of

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[134] Machtig to Eden, 16 January 1940, DO35/1072/276/124

[135] Campbell to Inskip, 24 March 1939 FO800/310; Campbell to Machtig, 20 December 1939, DO35/1072/276/124 (reference to destroyed document, Campbell to Harding, 25 August 1939, DO35/539/97/46)

[136] Campbell to Stephenson, 30 January 1940, DO35/539/70/1/2

[137] Campbell to Machtig, 27 February 1940, DO35/1072/276/124; minute by Stephenson, 21 March 1940, minute by Eden, 29 March 1940, minute by Machtig, 29 March 1940, DO35/539/70/1/2

internal DO files related to the negotiations for the Empire Air Training Scheme were finally closed.

What however had the department learnt from the affair? Its handling of events up to and including the Dominions' announcement that they would fight alongside Britain had given it only the smallest indication of what it might expect from the vastly different wartime environment. The negotiations for the Air Training Scheme therefore represented the first of these new experiences. As such, the DO responded, for the most part, ably and to the best of its abilities in dealing with what, largely thanks to the Air Ministry, quickly developed into a threatening situation. From the outset Mackenzie King had held a dominant negotiating position, an advantage which an experienced politician with his obviously highly developed sense of cunning was never likely to squander. This was well understood within the DO who repeatedly tried to warn their Whitehall colleagues what to expect. But with the Air Ministry taking the lead, all the department could effectively do was to monitor events, trying to ensure that the situation did not get too out of hand. Stephenson's involvement during the final meetings in the Air Ministry and his control of the more belligerent urges of some of those present, ensured the department ultimately proved successful in its efforts.

Campbell himself concluded, looking back on events, the DO 'helped me out especially with other UK departments which would have produced secession any day of the week if what was once described to me as the "bloody Post Office" had not done a most useful job'.[138] But the negotiations also carried some stark messages for the Office. Drawing upon his experiences, the same High Commissioner in Ottawa who had congratulated his adoptive department for its professionalism, also provided it with a serious warning. For Campbell the only future he could foresee was one in which the United Kingdom would be obliged to drive along a team of four other Dominions. Perhaps ominously, although he did not doubt that the 'somewhat unwieldy equipage' would ultimately triumph, he counseled the DO that it should

[138] Campbell to Batterbee, 20 May 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/2)

> ...not be surprised, or take it duly amiss, if one of the team from time to time turns round to argue on the subject of the road to take, the speed to be used, or even the advisability or possibility of proceeding further at all'.[139]

With this 'unhappy' forecast in mind, it seemed increasingly apparent that the department would find itself with much to do in the months and years ahead.

[139] Campbell to Eden, 19 December 1939, DO35/1072/276/115

CHAPTER FOUR

A Change in Britain's Government and the Role of the Dominion High Commissioners

(April 1940 – January 1941)

The Scandinavian Strategy

In December 1939 the First Canadian Division began to disembark from Scottish ports, the first contingent of troops to arrive on British shores since the outbreak of war. Within weeks both the First Echelon of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force and Australia's Sixth Division had also sailed from their respective home ports heading for the European war theatre. With the commitment of these troops, it was widely hoped within Whitehall that the former 'self-governing colonies' would quickly develop a far greater interest in the war.[1] Despite their increased activity however, the Dominion governments still displayed considerable difficulties in managing 'the transition of their countries from a peace to a war footing'. Pre-occupied and thought by certain London-based observers to be suffering from 'strong inferiority complexes', during this period there in fact remained a 'clear lack of active Dominion participation in the week-to-week direction' of the war.[2]

Domestic considerations were a significant factor behind this apparent lethargy. In January 1940 a general election had been announced in Ottawa as, seizing on the domestic goodwill generated with the agreement of the Air Training Plan and the safe arrival overseas of Canadian troops, Mackenzie King had sensed the moment was propitious to capitalise on his earlier hard-worked intrigues.[3] Privately there was speculation within the DO that defeat for the often unhelpful Canadian prime minister would be no bad thing, this assessment being in part fuelled by reports from the British High Commissioner that his one-time adversary had 'dug his own grave'.[4] Meanwhile the authorities in the Union of South Africa were also still struggling to 'come into the war' as the bitterness generated during the protracted national debate in September of the previous year, continued to prove divisive.[5] So bad in fact was this and the general situation so unpredictable that a commonly heard conclusion within Whitehall circles

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[1] Peake (FO News Department) to Eden, 1 February 1940, Avon Papers (AP20/8/286)

[2] 'Research Draft prepared by Mrs Agnew', August 1945, CAB102/33; Diary, 24 April 1940, Pearson Papers

[3] Minute by Dixon, 26 January 1940, FO371/25224

[4] Ibid., minutes by Bentinck, 12 & 26 January 1940

[5] Minute by Dixon, 21 February 1940, DO35/1003/3/4/32; minute by Dixon, 26 January 1940, FO371/25224; ibid., minute by Bentinck, 26 January 1940

was that 'if General Smuts had died before the outbreak of the war, South Africa would not have come in with us'.[6]

Although there was clearly therefore an obvious sense of distraction amongst many Dominion politicians, this did not permeate through to the War Cabinet in London where discussion was now focussed on British strategy in Scandinavia. Before the outbreak of war British planners had concluded, mistakenly as it was later found, that Germany would be seriously affected by any disruption of its iron ore supplies which it largely procured from mines in northern Sweden. Within days of being re-appointed First Lord of the Admiralty in September 1939 Winston Churchill had been told of these assessments, almost immediately making use of them to support his proposals to launch attacks against German forces from Norwegian and Swedish waters.[7] Despite the rejection of his initial arguments he had persisted with similar recommendations and, with activity on the Western Front stalled, by January 1940 was close to overcoming the objections of prime minister, Neville Chamberlain.[8] Two months later, and with the backing of a consensus within the cabinet, it seemed that an Allied Expeditionary Force might now actually be despatched to Scandinavia.

In the interim period though the First Lord had broadened his aims, the already somewhat questionable legitimacy of his scheme having expanded to include the securing of the Norwegian port of Narvik. Churchill proposed that future operations could be launched from here, in the first instance to provide assistance to Finland which, in December 1939, had been attacked by the Soviet Union. But by the time of this debate three months later, the government in Helsinki, now nearing collapse, was realistically beyond assistance. When asked for their views about the War Cabinet's thinking on Norway and, specifically, whether a more vigorous approach was required, there was a guarded response from the key Dominion governments. Indeed they

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[6] Minute by Bentinck, 2 February 1940, FO371/25224

[7] See Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: 1948) pp.373, 569; S.Roskill, *The Navy at War, 1939-1945* (London: 1960) pp.59-61; William Manchester, *Winston Churchill: The Caged Lion* (London: 1988) p.572; David Reynolds, 'Churchill in 1940: The Worst and Finest Hour' in Robert Blake & Wm. Roger Louis (ed.), *Churchill, A Major New Assessment* (Oxford: 1993) pp.241-245

[8] Churchill to Chamberlain, 25 December 1939, Chamberlain Papers; see Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: 1994) pp.416-428; Richard Collier, *The Years of Attrition* (London: 1993) pp.18-32, 34-48; Martin Gilbert, *Finest Hour: Winston S.Churchill, 1939-1941* (London: 1983) pp.127-284; David Irving, *Churchill's War, Volume One* (Australia: 1987) pp.205-254

offered little advice other than the standard rejection of anything which was believed might lead to a worsening of the existing situation.[9] The Dominion High Commissioners in London had more to say about matters. But this self-acclaimed 'junior War Cabinet', which was constantly seeking to develop its role, took a tone little different from that offered by their respective home governments.[10]

Scandinavian matters dominated a week of discussions chaired by Eden, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, in which Churchill's now formalised idea to disrupt the transportation of supplies to Germany by mining Norwegian territorial waters was exhaustively considered.[11] Leading the criticism of the plans was Australia's High Commissioner Stanley Bruce who had long regarded such an approach to be 'an extremely dangerous one', describing it to his Dominion colleagues as 'impracticably ruthless'.[12] During further meetings throughout early March, it was instead suggested that the best method for establishing some form of front in Scandinavia was a much more vigorous propaganda campaign. The aim of this, the High Commissioners concluded, would be to 'resist any further Russian or German aggression'. [13] Although widely criticised by those within Whitehall who heard it, on this occasion and with its attentions focused on proposals for a summer visit by Eden to Canada, the DO offered little comment about these proposals.[14] For Harding, now established in South Africa, the apparent sense of distraction he felt he detected in his former department made him uneasy. Writing to his brother-in-law in Wellington he could only speculate that the lack of 'deliberate and sound thinking' in London might perhaps be the result of 'too many trees and too little wood!'[15]

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[9] Campbell to Machtig, 27 February 1940, DO35/1072/276/124; Whiskard to Eden, 22 February 1940, DO121/111

[10] See Massey, *What's Past is Prologue*, pp.297-298

[11] WHC, 22-29 February 1940, DO121/7

[12] Lord Bruce's War Files, October 1939 (National Archives of Australia, Canberra) AA1969/275/1

[13] DO internal minute, 16 March 1940, DO35/1000/1/101

[14] Machtig to Eden, 2 April 1940, DO121/66; ibid., Chamberlain to Mackenzie King, 8 April 1940

[15] Harding to Batterbee, 17 March 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

Such foreboding must only have deepened at the end of the first week of April 1940 with the announcement that German forces had landed throughout Norway. This move came as a considerable surprise, not just to the War Cabinet, but also to those trying to manage Anglo-Dominion relations.[16] As senior political figures in London scrambled to respond, belatedly authorising the attempted capture of Narvik, the unprepared Dominion governments did likewise. Menzies was keenest for direct assistance to be provided believing it would help overcome 'the very little realisation of the meanings and obligations of war' which existed in Australia.[17] After a minority government for nearly a year, it had only recently been announced that he had successfully concluded negotiations allowing Earle Page's Country Party United to join a coalition with his Australia Party. While the coalition represented an obviously positive development, the situation was nonetheless still fragile.[18] In Canada meanwhile Mackenzie King's victory in the general election had left a situation in which it was anticipated his new government would continue to 'remain lukewarm about war measures which cannot be shown to be to [his] advantage'.[19] It was little surprise therefore that both countries should ask for copies of Churchill's speeches to the House of Commons and an appreciation from the DO of 'the situation and answers to the obvious questions which would be asked by the public'.[20]

At South Africa House Waterson responded more optimistically to events, claiming to feel more cheerful because of his belief that 'we always have a kick in the pants before we really get down to a war'.[21] Amongst the other High Commissioners though the news only brought a sense of despair, one which induced little desire for activity from them. With the Dominions' representatives at an apparent loss about how best to proceed, almost by default in the days that followed the South African High Commissioner therefore found himself taking charge. Waterson had been an early beneficiary of Smuts' victory in September 1939 which led to him taking control of

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[16] Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning*, pp.95-96

[17] Minute by Dixon, 20 March 1940, FO371/25222

[18] Ibid., minute by Dixon, 13 March 1940

[19] Minute by Mason, 7 April 1940, FO371/25224

[20] See J.W.Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, pp.77,107; WHC, 10/11 April 1940, DO121/7

[21] Diary, 10 April 1940, Waterson Papers

foreign policy; the External Affairs Department in Pretoria was, pre-war, dominated by officials with a pronounced anti-British outlook.[22] Having been moved from Paris to London, the South African prime minister had made it clear to the British government that his new representative could be entirely trusted. The latter had quickly settled into his role and, as an Allied catastrophe unfolded on the far side of the North Sea, the most important question for him now was the position of the Dominions in relation to the Supreme War Council.[23]

When this body had been reconstituted in September 1939 as part of the machinery to co-ordinate the war effort, a special committee composed of Eden, Maurice Hankey and Lord Chatfield, had recommended that, without any actual military participation, the Dominion governments should not be invited to join.[24] This limiting of numbers, initially accepted without complaint, might well have continued not to be challenged had not the Norwegian crisis intervened. But, with representatives from both Poland and Norway admitted to a Council meeting in the last week of April, Waterson saw an opportunity to press for a greater Dominion involvement. The situation had certainly changed since the outbreak of the war with Dominion naval and air units now actively engaged in operations. A small Canadian contingent had even been earmarked for despatch to Norway, albeit without Ottawa's prior knowledge.[25] This made it difficult for the DO, and Eden in particular, to dismiss the request out of hand.[26] After only a brief discussion the department's response, an invitation to the Dominion prime ministers to visit London later in the year, therefore appeared a well-calculated move as it effectively deferred any further discussion of the matter until such time as a conference could take place.[27] Also, in light of the quickly deteriorating situation in

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[22] *Evening News*, September 1939 (undated), Waterson Papers (A8.3: Scrapbook, 1939-40); Minute by Dixon, 6 March 1940, FO371/25224

[23] Diary, 3 April 1940, Waterson Papers; WHC, 22 April 1940, DO121/7

[24] Note on Supreme War Council, 24 April 1940, DO35/998/7/13; WM(39)15, 14 September 1939, CAB65/1

[25] See Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p.250

[26] 'A Note on Supreme War Council', 16 April 1940, DO35/998/7/13

[27] Diary, 24 April 1940, Pearson Papers

Norway which in far-off Wellington seemed something that Whitehall 'ought to have known was ill-advised', there was probably little else that could have been said.[28]

Although his efforts had thus been blocked, for Waterson they had nonetheless been an important confidence-building exercise. They had increased his own personal sense of prestige at a time when the small measure of influence the Dominions enjoyed in London appeared on the point of being extinguished. By the beginning of May, as the situation worsened further, much of the apparent stupor that in recent weeks had affected those around the South African High Commissioner, now vanished. In its place was a new enthusiasm as the daily meetings with the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs once again became the venue for more dynamic interest in the war's progress.[29] This was just as well for, if the German attack against Norway had come as a shock to the Dominion governments, the impact of the *Blitzkrieg* launched against the Low Countries and France at the end of the first week of May can only be imagined. Now with a German attack underway on the Continent and the Dominion leaders more indecisive than ever, it was left to their respective High Commissioners to provide a response to the change in the war.

From the very outset this they did, challenging Eden to involve them much more closely in the developing of a revised policy to deal with the situation now facing the Allies.[30] Whilst not unreceptive to their appeals, the Secretary of State was distracted by events surrounding him. The political implications of the Norwegian campaign were now beginning to be felt in London and, as news of the worsening situation in the Low Countries grew, to Waterson, observing the emergency Commons debate on Norway, it seemed unavoidable that Chamberlain would be replaced.[31] In his opinion, one shared by many others including Massey, Lord Halifax was the most likely next leader of the

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[28] Batterbee to Harding, 30 April 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[29] WHC, 1 May 1940, DO121/7; ibid. 4 May 1940; ibid., 6 May 1940

[30] Eden to Halifax, 9 May 1940, DO35/1000/1/110

[31] See John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Volume One* (London: 1985) pp.139-144; John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London: 1993) pp.395-434; Robert Blake, 'How Churchill Became Prime Minister' in Blake & Louis (ed.), *Churchill, A Major New Assessment,* pp.257-274; Sir John Wheeler-Bennett (et al), *Action this Day: Working with Churchill* (London: 1968) pp.203-204

country.[32] It is perhaps odd therefore that when the new Cabinet was revealed, the announcement that the prime minister would not be the Foreign Secretary but instead Churchill, 'the greatest adventurer of modern political history', left the South African representative in London with little to say.[33] There is also scant comment to be found from the other High Commissioners or any of the principals within the DO, a silence which, in the light of what was to follow, was a little surprising.

A Change in Leadership

Churchill's relationship with the British Empire has been well examined, a sort of 'romantic Disraelianism' according to one view, and his approach to the Dominions was entirely consistent with his wider Imperial beliefs.[34] Having asked in 1906 for a position within the CO, as parliamentary under-secretary he opposed some of the earliest discussions about giving the Colonies, as they then were called, a foreign policy role.[35] According to the frustrated Amery, who had first proposed the expansion, Churchill's approach was that 'the Colonial PM's should be given a good time and sent away well banqueted, but empty-handed'.[36] Although they were friends of a sort, the two men often clashed. So much so the individual who can take much of the credit for creating the DO would later complain that the wartime prime minister, 'Congenitally Little England' as he once referred to him, 'never really possessed an "imperial" or "commonwealth" intellect'.[37]

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[32] Diary, 8 May 1940, Waterson Papers

[33] Ibid., Diary, 12 May 1940; ibid., 13 May 1940

[34] For example see Ronald Hyam, 'Churchill and the British Empire' in Blake & Louis (ed.), *Churchill, A Major New Assessment* , pp.167-186; D.C.Watt, *Personalities and Policies*, p.162; Machtig had 'some most interesting stories' about the prime minister's relationship with the Dominions but he could not be induced to share them, instead preferring to keep them to himself, even after Churchill's death; Dixon to Batterbee, 21 March 1968, Batterbee Papers (Box 20)

[35] Sir Evelyn Wrench, 'Churchill and the Empire' in Charles Eade (ed.), *Churchill by His Contemporaries* (London: 1953) p.288

[36] Leo Amery, *My Political Life: Volume 1, England Before the Storm* (London: 1953) p.196

[37] Wm. Roger Louis, *In the Name of God Go!*, p.89; Wm. Roger Louis, 'Churchill and Egypt' in Blake & Louis (ed.), *Churchill, A Major New Assessment,* p.486

Despite a second term at the CO in 1921-22, this time as Secretary of State, as with most things Churchill's attitude towards the Empire was based largely on personal experience and in this respect his contact with the Dominions had been limited. He had gained first hand knowledge of South Africa from his soldiering days during the Boer War, developing a strong relationship with Jan Smuts in the process. This endured to the latter's death and ensured that Churchill was perhaps freer with his time and information with his friend in Pretoria than with any other Dominion figure.[38] Although the South African prime minister was a regular wartime correspondent, he was nonetheless not blind to the strengths and weaknesses of his old friend's character. His advice to Waterson was that 'Winston is an actor, an artist, and in this war he is playing his part and no one can stop him'.[39] In the case of New Zealand, although he had never met any of its key politicians prior to the war, much of the reason behind his favourable wartime attitude also came from a personal relationship, This time it was with General, later Field Marshal, Bernard Freyberg. As with Smuts, here was an individual whose exploits during the First World War, when he had been awarded a Victoria Cross, helped guarantee Churchill's lasting admiration. To be deemed brave and possessing of a forceful conviction in the prime minister's eyes was often the key to enjoying some lasting form of his patronage.[40]

As for the other Dominions, although Churchill had first met Mackenzie King in London in November 1906 and had been a regular visitor to the North American continent, he had virtually no knowledge of Australia, a deficiency which would leave him seriously disadvantaged. With nothing else on which to base an assessment, his enduring belief in Australian troops as 'brave men', which he first gained during the Boer War and maintained, almost without exception, to his death, therefore was critical.[41] His only political contacts had come in the form of Australian censure for his Dardanelles strategy and protests against his decision when Chancellor of the Exchequer to return Britain to the Gold Standard. Such criticism did not endear the authorities in Canberra to him; and he had first noticed Menzies, who later described him as 'the Englishman

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[38] 'Winston Churchill', Round Table (March 1965), p.104

[39] Diary, 3 November 1942, Waterson Papers

[40] I.Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete* (London: 1966) p.51

[41] See Roland Quinault, 'Churchill and Australia, 1899-1945', War and Society, Volume 6, Number 1 (May 1988), pp.41-49

par excellence', when the Australian had supported the Munich settlement.[42] Although the two would profess great friendship for one another, it was at best only conditional, as Churchill never really came close to grasping the different nature of Australian politics to that which he experienced daily in London.

For an individual who preferred the term 'British Empire' to 'British Commonwealth' it was perhaps not surprising that he had opposed the DO's creation from the outset, arguing that the handling of Dominion affairs required, at most, 'the deliberate and reflective study of two or three selected and experienced officials'.[43] He had subsequently gone on to raise serious objections about the Statute of Westminster, 'a clumsy attempt to remove imaginary grievances', which he feared would provide an undesirable precedent for India and Eire.[44] Even in an article written shortly prior to the war's outbreak, his conclusion still remained that 'in questions of war and peace, the Dominions trust the Mother Country'.[45] For one official within the DO these were 'quaint notions about the Commonwealth...harking back to the Empire at its apogee as [Churchill] knew it in his early manhood'.[46] Garner thought that this led the wartime leader to 'sometimes treat [the Empire] with more rhetoric than realism'. His assessment was also agreed with by one of Churchill's military advisers who thought 'he found it difficult to remember that the leaders of the Dominions required handling rather differently...from the way in which they were handled thirty years before'.[47]

Whilst there was silence within the Dominions' ranks about Britain's new leader, this was not matched by any shortage of comment from them about the choice as new Secretary of State. Eden had failed to impress at least two of the High Commissioners, Waterson having felt him to be 'modest, sincere and well-bred, the stuff of which

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[42] Robert Menzies, 'Churchill and the Commonwealth' in Sir James Marchant (ed.), *WSC: Servant of Crown and Commonwealth* (London: 1954) p.92

[43] Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, p.16; Churchill to Amery, 7 December 1924, DO121/1

[44] Winston Churchill, 'The Statute of Westminster' (undated draft manuscript) Chartwell Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge) CHAR8/565

[45] Ibid., 'The Mystery of Empire', *Sunday Dispatch*, published 17 March 1940 (CHAR8/166)

[46] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.13, 55, 153

[47] Sir Ian Jacob, Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet in *Action the Day, Working with Churchill*, p.204

Englishmen like their political leaders to be made' but 'not ruthless or tough enough for war', a view generally shared by his Australian counterpart.[48] Nonetheless, and despite his initial reluctance at being sent to what he feared would be a backwater, the departing Secretary of State was 'genuinely sorry to leave' for the War Office, although grateful that he no longer had to endure 'Bruce's daily catechism'.[49] It took three days to find his replacement, the delay arising in part from the difficulties facing Churchill in creating a balanced Cabinet politically acceptable to everybody. Further disruption occurred however when his first choice, Oliver Stanley, turned down the appointment.[50] This, as he later confided to Hugh Dalton, was because he had seen how Churchill had treated Eden and concluded that it would be impossible to work with the new prime minister.[51] Churchill's second selection was Lord Caldecote, 'that amiable inflated barrage balloon' and 'relic of the old deal' who as Thomas Inskip had occupied the position prior to Eden. With his acceptance of the post, this allowed the former Chancellor of the Exchequer John Simon, a staunch Chamberlain supporter, to be given the Lord Chancellorship.[52]

Whilst Sir Cosmo Parkinson, the DO's PUS who was poised to return to the CO, was delighted upon hearing of Caldecote's return and the New Zealand High Commissioner Bill Jordan felt sufficiently confident to disappear from London for a few days, the other High Commissioners were far from pleased.[53] Indeed, both Bruce and Massey lost little time in offering their views on his earlier performance to Waterson, who had been absent from the British political scene during the Secretary of State's previous period in charge.[54] Amongst the most alarming incidents they pointed to was in April 1939 during the Prague crisis when 'the door mouse...dead from the neck up' had apparently

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[48] Diary, 17 April 1940, Waterson Papers; ibid., 11 May 1940; 'Conversation with Neville Henderson', 13 October 1939, Lord Bruce's Files

[49] Diary, 12 May 1940, Avon Papers

[50] Oliver Stanley to Churchill, 13 May 1940, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/11/62-64)

[51] Ben Pimlott (ed.), *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1940-45* (London: 1986) pp.190-91

[52] Diary, 15 May 1940, Pearson Papers; Memoirs, May 1940-April 1943, Martin Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge) MART

[53] Parkinson to Batterbee, 16 May 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/3)

[54] WHC, 17 May 1940, DO121/8

fallen asleep whilst sitting next to Chamberlain at a meeting. Although Massey claimed not to dislike Inskip personally, he was not happy about giving the leadership of the DO as 'a consolation prize' to 'a second rate politician who had peacefully ascended the ladder as a good party man'.[55] Bruce meanwhile complained to Canberra that the appointment of 'a discarded Lord Chancellor' was less than complimentary to the Dominions. Even Pearson, whose opinions were periodically relayed back to his colleagues in Ottawa, felt that Caldecote's appointment was the clearest indication yet of the lack of importance attached to the Dominions' portfolio within the Cabinet.[56]

This assessment was in fact only all too accurate, certainly in the context of on-going events at the DO which, although it was doing 'all it could to get information and pass it on' to the Dominion governments, remained entirely 'dependent on others for the material'.[57] The High Commissioners viewed the degree of information available to them to be so poor that they had taken to attending the Canadian Military Headquarters every day to better track developments. Indeed there were clearly still obvious shortcomings as was evident from Menzies' complaints upon officially being advised that the French might collapse.[58] His remonstrations had first begun in mid-May about what he then saw as a failure to receive 'sufficiently comprehensive reviews of Allied operations and strategy'.[59] This most recent update however led him to now comment that the latest turn of events 'must have been due to sudden developments for it has apparently not been possible for us to be supplied with facts or an appreciation which supports this view'. Although the British prime minister responded that day, warning his Dominion counterparts of the possibility of 'an early heavy attack' on Britain, it would still be some time before he agreed that they might be informed of the seriousness of the situation in France.[60] Even this decision, however, came only after Chamberlain, now Lord President of the Council, had

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[55] Diary, 15 May 1940, Waterson Papers; Diary, 15 May 1940, Massey Papers

[56] Bruce to Menzies, 15 May 1940 in R.G.Neale (ed.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, Volume III: 1940* (Canberra: 1979) (hereafter 'DAFP III'); Dairy, 15 May 1940, Pearson Papers

[57] Ibid. Parkinson to Batterbee, 16 May 1940

[58] Telegram from Menzies to DO, 23 May 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B

[59] Minute by Bentinck, 13 May 1940, FO371/25222

[60] Churchill to Dominion prime ministers, 23 May 1940, PREM4/43B/1; WM(40)140, 26 May 1940, CAB65/13

explicitly raised the point, enquiring in front of the entire War Cabinet what information could be given to the Dominion governments.

Despite his concerns, both about being kept uninformed and regarding the final destination of Australian troops already under sail for Europe, Menzies nonetheless lost little time in pledging 'the whole of the Commonwealth's resources to victory'.[61] With Mackenzie King already having authorised the despatch of four Canadian destroyers to Britain, Peter Fraser, who had only recently become New Zealand prime minister following Malcolm Savage's death, also telegraphed to London with a commitment to 'be with you to the last, come what may'.[62] The South African response was more tempered, however, with Smuts recognising France's likely denouement to mean that 'the British Commonwealth will be left alone to continue the struggle'.[63] The High Commissioners in London also seemed to be in more questionable spirit. Bruce thought it 'criminal' that the War Cabinet had failed, in his opinion, to fully consider the implications of a French collapse, and consequently he had developed 'a most gloomy view of British prospects if France went out of the war'.[64] The seven-page note which he produced and sent to the already over-worked Churchill proposing an international conference to arrange a peace settlement was not surprisingly very badly received.[65]

Meanwhile, as the calls escalated from Halifax for Churchill to consider the merits of a settlement with Germany, within the DO itself the vastly increased tempo of the war was beginning to tell.[66] Aside from the general day-to-day management of the department and almost hourly requests from the Antipodean Dominions for a strategic appreciation of the situation, there were new tasks to be handled such as finalising

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[61] Whiskard to DO, 27 May 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B; John Robertson & John McCarthy, *Australian War Strategy 1939-1945* (Queensland: 1985) pp.75-80

[62] Batterbee to DO, 27 May 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B; Diary, 24 May 1940, Mackenzie King Papers

[63] Harding to DO, 27 May 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B

[64] WM(40)141, 27 May 1940, CAB65/13; see Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, pp.286-299

[65] Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p.435

[66] See Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: 1991) pp.156-163, 169-173

how operations might continue following an invasion.[67] At the same time the quite plainly vacillating Menzies had just started the first of what would prove to be three attempts to initiate a 'peace' initiative involving the United States.[68] For at least one of the British High Commissioners serving in the Dominions, the hard to follow situation demonstrated 'a want of correlation' from a 'badly overworked department'.[69]

The position was further complicated by the information coming from the War Office. On several occasions during the first six months of the war, members of the War Cabinet in London had suggested that the Dominion governments be induced to commit troops to the Western Front.[70] Each time though, it had reluctantly been recognised by the British ministers concerned that the obvious benefits this would bring notwithstanding, there was little enthusiasm for the project outside Whitehall. Now, with a dire shortage of equipment in Britain making it impossible to accept the Dominions' offers to send more troops, there was confirmation that 'the entry of Italy into the war appears inevitable'.[71]

Aside from re-emphasising the difficulties of fulfilling the already restless Dominion's requests for military supplies, this carried obvious wider strategic considerations. And not just for South Africa, but also in terms of the British government's continuing strategy in regard to the Far East.[72] There were also potential constitutional issues to consider as, with the experience of the outbreak of war against Germany still clearly in their minds, the DO's legal experts now rushed to revise the procedure for the issuing

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[67] WHC, 28 May 1940, DO121/8; Memorandum, May 1940, DO35/548E/22/9/3

[68] See P.G.Edwards, 'R.G.Menzies Appeals to the United States, May-June 1940', *Australian Outlook*, No.28 (1974); P.G.Edwards, 'S.M.Bruce, R.G.Menzies and Australia's War Aims and Peace Aims, 1939-1940', *Historical Studies* (17) No.66, 1976/77, pp.10,11

[69] Harding to Batterbee, 5 June 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[70] WM(39)50, 19 October 1939, CAB65/1; WM(39)75-78, 8-10 November 1939, CAB65/2; telegram from R.Campbell, 25 November 1939, CAB21/952; see Michael Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office and France During the Phoney War, September 1939-May 1940' in M.L.Dockrill & B.McKercher (ed.), *Diplomacy and World Power, Studies in British Foreign Policy 1890-1950* (Cambridge: 1996) pp.181,192

[71] Eden to Inskip, 3 June 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B; ibid. War Office to Archer, 30 May 1940

[72] 'Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty on Australian and New Zealand Naval Defence', WP135(39), 23 November 1939, CAB67/3; WM(39)92, 23 November 1939, CAB65/2

of a new declaration of war by the Dominions against Italy.[73] It was clear to many that heightened sensitivities needed to be taken into account far more than had previously been the case, especially, following its close brush with neutrality, in the South African case. An acceptable solution was found though, in spite of the difficult circumstances prevailing, and Italy's entry into the war in mid-June passed off with considerably less concern within the department than had been the case nine months beforehand.

The Effects of the Fall of France

For the High Commissioners in London, aside from continuing efforts to strengthen their own position, their attention remained squarely focussed on the implications of France's demise. With the Dominion governments being advised by the British War Cabinet, following a visit by Churchill to the front in mid-June, that 'the French are now on what must be regarded as their last line', their respective representatives in London were poised to make a bold move.[74] They had become aware that the Chiefs of Staff reports which included 'action recommended in a certain eventuality', actually dealt with how to respond to France's surrender. These they now duly requested access to, again demonstrating the resolve which had grown within the group not to be overlooked in the Allied policy making process.[75] To have not allowed them to see these documents would have carried dangerous implications. Most obviously it would provide substance to their complaints about the paucity of information distributed to them, a possibility fully understood by Caldecote. Having promised to do what he could, the next day he went before the War Cabinet warning his peers that 'it was not enough to tell [the Dominion governments] all that had passed, they must be treated as full partners and their assent must not be taken for granted'.[76]

Based on his previous period as Secretary of State this was a somewhat uncharacteristically bold move. Nonetheless Caldecote's efforts on this occasion

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[73] Dixon to Ronald (FO), 10 June 1940, DO35/1003/8/13; ibid. minute by Garner, 13 June 1940; minute by Stephenson, 14 June 1940; see Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, pp.43-44

[74] Telegram to Dominions, 12 June 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B

[75] See P.M.H.Bell, *A Certain Eventuality* (London: 1974) p.31-54; WHC, 12 June 1940, DO121/8

[76] Ibid., WHC, 12 June 1940; WM(40)165, 13 June 1940, CAB65/7

produced quick results with both the High Commissioners and the Dominion governments being given details of the two Chiefs of Staff reports later that day.[77] From the tone of the meeting's minutes however, it was clear that Churchill was unhappy about the manner in which the decision had been forced upon him, something that had the potential for later repercussions. What was perhaps worse though was that the documents the Dominion governments and High Commissioners had received from the 'charming old man' in charge of the DO did not make for especially pleasant reading.[78] And, as the department had feared, there was a poor reception to the news they contained. This was that the deteriorating situation made it unlikely British force would be sent in the first instance to the Far East in the event of a Japanese attack.

For the DO much of the following week would e spent attempting to calm the heightened worries of the two Antipodean Dominions.[79] As on previous occasions, of the two countries concerned, New Zealand's was the more measured official response with the authorities there officially renewing their pledge of 'every form of assistance within our power'.[80] But in a separate private telegram, formally addressed from the Governor-General in order to emphasise the gravity of the matter, it was made clear that the news had generated considerable political dismay.[81] For the most part this was because the long-standing premise of British assistance had 'formed the basis of the whole of the Dominion's defence preparations'. In attempting to ease these fears all the DO could do was to point to the fact that the current situation was more serious than had ever previously been anticipated.[82] Assisted by Batterbee, acting in his capacity 'not as United Kingdom High Commissioner but as the friend of New Zealand'

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[77] Telegram for Dominion prime ministers only, 14 June 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B; WHC, 13 June 1940, DO121/8; Chiefs of Staff Report, June 1940, WP168(40), CAB66/7; Chiefs of Staff Report, June 1940, WP201(40), CAB66/8

[78] WM(40)165, 13 June 1940, CAB65/7; Dairy, 3 June 1940, Waterson Papers

[79] Ibid., telegram for Dominion prime ministers only, 14 June 1940

[80] Batterbee to DO, 15 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/1

[81] Governor-General to Caldecote, 15 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/2

[82] Ibid., Machtig to Vice-Admiral Phillips, 22 June 1940

and with the despatch of reassurances by London that there 'would be a review if the position in the Far East should become threatening', the situation was resolved.[83]

So much so in fact that, despite the continuing view within the highest levels of the DO that New Zealand had 'never put a foot wrong from the start', the government in Wellington now determined to reiterate their loyalty to Britain. Their offer to send a special mission to Washington to try and secure American support was however rejected out-of-hand by the FO for whom such a move would only 'provide ammunition for the Isolationists'.[84] The DO was therefore obliged to politely decline the offer, at the same time taking the opportunity to register a mild, private rebuke to Batterbee for 'having gone rather too far' in his efforts.[85]

Seeming somewhat overwhelmed by the pressures associated with leading a coalition government, for Menzies the disclosure of British intentions was sufficient to induce apparent panic. This was most visibly demonstrated, once again, by his often contradictory statements.[86] Described earlier in the year by the British High Commissioner in Canberra to his peers in the DO as 'having no more backbone than a jellyfish', there was apparently no reason to alter this assessment. Indeed there was an especially poor reception to his insistence that, should Hitler suggest terms on which he would be prepared to conclude peace with the Allies, the United States should be approached for guidance, 'no matter what form it might take'.[87] Twenty-four hours later however, in a note to his High Commissioner in London, he was willing once more to follow Britain 'whatever sacrifice victory may demand'.[88] But news the following day that in any Franco-German peace agreement, French possessions in the Pacific

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[83] Batterbee to DO, 18 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/4; Machtig to Phillips, 22 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/2

[84] Caldecote to Batterbee, 26 July 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/1)

[85] Mason to Garner, 19 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/2; ibid., Garner to Stephenson, 20 June 1940; Machtig to Caldecote, 21 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/4; see Anne Orde, *The Eclipse of Great Britain, The United States and British Imperial Decline, 1895-1956* (London: 1996) pp.130-31

[86] Robert Menzies, *Afternoon Light* (London: 1967) pp.17-19

[87] Whiskard to Eden, 22 February 1940, DO121/11; Menzies to DO, 16 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/3

[88] Menzies to Bruce, 17 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/4

might be allotted to Japan, had him once again desperately looking towards the United States for assistance.[89]

Bearing in mind his obvious unease, there appeared little that could be sensibly undertaken by the DO to calm him. All that was done therefore was to thank the Australian leader for his comments and pass on to him an FO report. This made it clear that the British government had 'received no indication that the enemy are at present contemplating a peace offer'.[90] In terms of any lasting calming effect this however appeared to do little and within the department it was decided to prepare another telegram, this time in Churchill's name. No doubt it was hoped that this might instill in the Australian leader some greater measure of resolve.[91] Certainly this new message produced some respite, for at least a time, in the flow of telegrams from Canberra. This was just as well for soothing the Antipodean Dominions' distresses was not the DO's sole preoccupation.

Whilst Smuts' encouraging comments were still providing considerable cheer to Churchill, a quorum of the High Commissioners had continued to campaign for a greater involvement in the management of the war.[92] Only hours after Marshal Pétain, France's third leader in as many months, had signed the armistice with Germany, Halifax found himself apologising to an angry Waterson and Bruce for not being able to see them. In so doing he explained rather caustically that he had 'been and am [still] overwhelmed with appointments on several matters that seemed very urgent'.[93] This explanation was apparently not sufficient, however, to forestall another request for a meeting being submitted shortly afterwards. Now viewed by at least one of the High Commissioners as 'a fatuous...ineffective old man and an insult to the Dominions as Secretary of State', with this Caldecote had little choice other than to request that Churchill himself might discuss recent events with the Dominions' representatives.[94]

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[89] Menzies to DO, 18 June 1940, DO35/1003/1/3/7

[90] FO to DO, 19 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/3; DO to Whiskard, 21 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/7

[91] Churchill to Menzies (via Whiskard), 23 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/4

[92] Harding to DO, 19 June 1940, DO35/1004/11/5/3

[93] Halifax to Massey, 23 June 1940, DO121/8

[94] Diary, 23 June 1940, Waterson Papers; WHC, 25 June 1940, DO121/8

In agreeing that there would be a meeting, although not for a month, the prime minister made his views known about the High Commissioners' attempts to involve themselves more closely in managing the war effort. This he did most clearly by informing his Dominions Secretary that he would subsequently be required to attend the War Cabinet on just two days a week, when the Chiefs of Staff visited. This drew an astonished Waterson to bitterly complain that 'the PM clearly did not understand the part the High Commissioners were playing'.[95] The truth of course was that Churchill's move was the most obvious indication so far that he was entirely aware of what they were doing. The one obvious beneficiary of this decision, despite having to face the increased anger of the Dominion representatives in London, was Caldecote for whom it appears to have come as something of a blessing. The weary Secretary of State had grown convinced that he was little more than 'postman and correspondent', having yet to receive even a personal minute from his prime minister who not officially contact him until mid-August.[96]

A similar sentiment may also have been shared elsewhere within his over-worked department. Machtig, the DO's deputy-head, continued to find his superior 'a delightful chief, completely unperturbable and cheerful in the most desperate moments and crisis'. [97] But at the same time the summer months of 1940 had been 'a dreadful strain, that left everyone at the Office feeling rather tired'. The High Commissioners were not without blame, 'stamp[ing] outside [Caldecote's] door if kept waiting for meetings [which] seldom achieved a temperature above tepid'.[98] But, for this angry group, the prime minister's rebuff was a new call-to-arms, one which seemed only to re-focus their energies and ensure that further confrontation would follow.

The Way Forward

With the Battle of Britain poised to begin and preparations to repel the now anticipated German invasion intensifying, there were pressing matters to consider. In Smuts'

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[95] Diary, 28 June 1940, Waterson Papers

[96] Caldecote to Batterbee, 26 July 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/1); Churchill to Caldecote, 15 August 1940, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/13/8)

[97] Machtig to Batterbee, 28 August 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/2)

[98] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.199

assessment this included Operation CATAPULT, the 'necessary' attack carried out against the French fleet at Oran in the first week of July by elements of the Royal Navy. To him it represented both an end to France's agony and the beginning of efforts to restore it and its 'sick people who were [now] in need of moral nursing'.[99] Following further study of the revelations contained within the Chiefs of Staff 'certain eventuality' reports, for the Antipodean Dominions their escalating concerns over Far Eastern strategy were the more urgent priority. These anxieties worsened with the news, at the end of June 1940, that the authorities in Tokyo had called for the closure of the Burma Road, the only route still open to supply the Chinese government in Chungking in their war against Japan.

When asked by Churchill for his opinion about the demand, Robert Craigie, British Ambassador in Tokyo, warned that unless it was carried out, war was probable, one which according to the Chiefs of Staff could at this stage only result in further disaster.[100] Menzies was in full agreement, Batterbee reading the telegrams in Wellington finding it 'tragic that egged on by Bruce he should adopt so weak and defeatist an attitude'.[101] His counterpart in Canberra meanwhile could only despair that 'Australia was still fast asleep'.[102] The High Commissioners in London were however of a similar mind to the Australian leader urging 'retreat and concessions' from the DO and making daily representations to Caldecote that some form of settlement should be reached. Their primary concern was that Britain should 'not give way over China if it means that Japan would be encouraged to attack us later', a possibility which they still hoped could be negated by keeping the United States well informed. Bruce, finding the situation 'fraught with risks', thought even this was not enough his solution being 'full and frank negotiations with the Soviet authorities', although in this suggestion he found himself a lone voice.[103] Only with Caldecote's assurances that Tokyo was likely

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[99] Smuts to Churchill, 12 July 1940, DO35/1003/11/1/36; ibid., Churchill to Smuts, 13 July 1940; see A.J.Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran* (London: 1974) pp.206-288; Bell, *A Certain Eventuality,* pp.38, 152-156; Warren Tute, *The Deadly Strike* (London: 1973) pp.36-62; see Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, Appendix E, p.573

[100] See David Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War* (New York: 1988) pp.25-27; Churchill, *Finest Hour*, p.214

[101] Batterbee to Whiskard, 6 July 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/5)

[102] Ibid., Whiskard to Batterbee, 22 July 1940

[103] Ibid., Batterbee to Whiskard, 6 July 1940; WHC, 6-18 July 1940, DO121/9

to accept a proposal of a three month closure of the Burma Road were the Dominion representatives sufficiently reconciled to, at least temporarily, switch their attentions.

How to respond to a long-anticipated German peace offensive had been a regular debate for the High Commissioners ever since they had begun daily meetings at the war's outset.[104] With a compromise with Japan now apparently likely, the focus switched to a lengthy telegram from Smuts giving views on a possible move by Hitler to offer some form of settlement. Seizing upon this Waterson once more put forward for discussion a matter about which there were strong views, not least that 'the old order in Europe was dead'.[105] These arguments were delivered with such a degree of unanimity as to leave the DO in little doubt that there was 'keen interest in the problem', although no great certainty on how best to proceed.[106] A private note to Waterson however ultimately proved sufficient in the first instance. At some length this outlined the main features Britain desired for post-war re-organisation, namely some form of a 'United States of Europe' along with more general disarmament and economic and social improvement.[107] Following this the High Commissioners' attentions were once again free to return to the long-anticipated meeting with the prime minister.

In late July Churchill finally met with the group for an hour-long discussion devoted entirely to events in the Far East. His argument was two-fold, the first part being that the agreement over the Burma Road had been made purely to gain time in the hope that the United States would soon be able to take a stronger line in the Pacific. In the meantime the neutralising of the French Navy's vessels at Oran and Alexandria earlier in the month freed British ships to proceed east for the protection of Australasia if required.[108] Although still reiterating his intense dislike for the prime minister, even Waterson seemed sufficiently impressed by the encounter to afterwards privately describe Churchill as 'the man for the moment...[his] desire reflecting the purpose and

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[104] WHC, 6-12 October 1939, DO121/6

[105] WHC, 18 July 1940, DO121/9

[106] Ibid., note to Halifax, 20 July 1940

[107] Note on Smuts' proposals, 23 July 1940, DO35/1000/1/124

[108] Waterson to Smuts, 26 July 1940, Waterson Papers

spirit of the people'.[109] Despite this there is little reason to believe though that the discussion actually did much to assuage the Dominions' anxieties.

Only three days later, following advice from his senior staff, Caldecote again found himself having to warn his unhappy prime minister. Now it was believed within the DO that neither Australia nor New Zealand would permit the imminent despatch of troop convoys intended for the Middle East unless some form of Far Eastern appreciation was supplied to them.[110] This message may help to account for the unannounced meeting that took place the next day between Lord Halifax and the Dominion High Commissioners.[111] Perhaps held to help ease their once again mounting insecurities, during the encounter the foreign secretary talked at length about the War Cabinet's current discussions, outlining the alternatives which he felt existed in the Far East. Afterwards even the normally fainthearted Bruce was willing to announce that Australia would now be prepared to support 'a policy of standing up to Japan while she was still heavily engaged in China', a remarkable *volte face* in the light of some of his earlier comments.[112] With the news that an appreciation of the Far Eastern situation would be sent to the Dominion capitals in early August, these comments were most likely the result of a growing sense amongst the High Commissioners that they were making progress with their wider goal.[113]

Their satisfaction may have been added to by an announcement now made by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. With the prime minister travelling to Placentia Bay off Newfoundland to meet with the US president, Franklin Roosevelt, Caldecote informed the Dominions' representatives of his intention to take a more vigorous attitude towards the Ministerial Committee on the Middle East which Churchill had recently formed.[114] Chaired by Eden, the Secretary of State for War, and assisted by Amery, now Secretary of State for India, and Lord Lloyd, the Secretary of States for

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[109] Diary, 26 July 1940, Waterson Papers

[110] WM(40)214, 29 July 1940, CAB65/14

[111] WHC, 31 July 1940, DO121/9

[112] 'Note of a meeting', 31 July 1940, DO35/1000/1/124

[113] See Robertson & McCarthy, *Australian War Strategy*, pp.146-149

[114] WHC, 8 August 1940, DO121/9; *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay* (London: 1960) p.192

the Colonies, at the end of July this body had invited Australia and New Zealand to deploy any forces they could spare to the Middle East. Caldecote did not apparently view this move as taking the matter seriously enough. Such 'concern at the apparent lack of active policy' was seen as evidence by Waterson that the High Commissioners had 'stirred up the old boy since we have had him'.[115] Doubts still remained as to whether their respective governments had been informed in advance or not and what priority would be applied to deciding upon requirements for equipment. But it was with an almost self-congratulatory tone that the Dominion High Commissioners subsequently noted Australian and New Zealand forces were to be moved to Egypt.[116]

Pressure on the DO's staff was meanwhile growing. They faced not just with the High Commissioners' unrelenting demands for greater recognition but also the Battle of Britain during which the Office's staff had had to 'withdraw to the air-raid shelters on several occasions'.[117] Liesching for one was glad when, in August, the prime minister ordered that the Administrative Grade of the Civil Service should take a fortnight's leave as 'the sight of a pen and paper was making him feel physically sick'.[118] Machtig apparently felt it necessary to stress to a former colleague that the department was 'still a very happy place in spite of the strain, immense hours and exacting conditions, and everybody remains sane and balanced'.[119] There was no denying however that in light of the demands being placed upon it, the DO was now badly undermanned leaving the PUS looking forward to 'obtaining some promising material who for some reason or another are unfit for military service'.[120] This extra assistance would be needed for, as Churchill met secretly with Eden and Margesson, the Chief Whip, to discuss possible replacements for the thankless Caldecote, there was little sign of any reduction in the workload.[121]

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[115] Diary, 8 August 1940, Waterson Papers

[116] WHC, 23 August 1940, DO121/9; ibid. 26 August 1940; ibid., 29 August 1940

[117] Machtig to Batterbee, 28 August 1940, DO35/1000/1/24

[118] Ibid., Liesching to Batterbee, 3 September 1940

[119] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.165

[120] Machtig to Batterbee, 28 August 1940, DO35/1000/1/24

[121] Diary, 2 September 1940, Avon Papers

The Implications of MENACE

On a number of occasions throughout the summer months of 1940, with the DO's concerns continuing to be largely ignored, the British government failed to inform the respective Dominion governments of the policies it intended to pursue. The offer of union made to France in June and the ultimatum delivered to the French naval forces prior to the beginning of Operation CATAPULT were the two most obvious examples. Although, in the first case, very few British officials had been informed in advance, the incredulity within the DO was so severe that Caldecote allegedly threatened to resign in protest.[122] As Liesching noted,

> No Dominion government could conceal that fact that it had not been given time to express its views. The feeling on this ground would be one of insult and humiliation [and to] all opponents in the Dominions of the Imperial connection [it] would prove that so called Dominion autonomy was a mockery.[123]

Both decisions were nonetheless for the most part accepted within the Dominion capitals themselves, it being understood that the speed at which events were developing had not always allowed for any prior forewarning of British action. News of Operation MENACE, however, the attempt to seize the West African port of Dakar from Vichy French control, was not so well greeted. With this announcement all of the Dominions were deeply concerned about the manner in which the operation had been handled and the lack of information they had received.[124]

Churchill himself would later admit to having only kept Smuts informed of events and this only amounted to one telegram of a personal nature, an omission which would later prove a particular source of embarrassment.[125] In fact in the days immediately prior to the operation's launch in late September 1940 there are no minutes to be found on the subject in the available DO archives, the first reference only coming after

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[122] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.201

[123] Minute by Liesching, 17 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/1/4

[124] See Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp.747-752, 787-790, 804-810; Irving, *Churchill's War*, pp.385-386, 420-424; Churchill, *Finest Hour*, pp.390-394, 569-572

[125] Ibid., Churchill, *Finest Hour*, pp.389-90; minute by Holmes, 1 October 1940, DO35/1003/11/1/74

the raid had failed.[126] If the Dominions had realised that they were also being kept entirely uninformed about the still fluctuating debate between the prime minister and Eden as to whether the Australian troops already garrisoned in Britain should be despatched to the Middle East, they would likely have been even angrier.[127]

When the Dominion prime ministers were finally fully informed of what had taken place at Dakar and, specifically, the degree to which the enterprise had proven a great failure, there was a strong reaction. This was most pointed from Menzies, despite the domestic political ramifications of the aborted raid appearing to be less damaging for him than for his counterparts in Canada or the Union of South Africa. Whilst Ottawa feared what reaction the attack on French territory and shipping would produce in Quebec and Smuts was worried about emphasising the strategic value of Dakar to the enemy, Australia could claim few such strategic concerns. Menzies' specific interest lay with the cruiser *HMAS 'Australia'* which had been used in the operation without his being informed in advance. With the full backing of Bruce in London, this was however more than sufficient cause for him to at once fly into a fury.[128]

For the DO, already worried about the potential for 'misunderstandings' which could arise when composing the obviously urgent reply, the suggestion that Churchill regarded Menzies' criticisms as a personal attack brought still greater cause for concern.[129] Had the prime minister known that the Australians were not the only ones being critical of him the Office's sense of trepidation might have been worse. Waterson confided to his diary that the 'Dakar business [had been] an even more grisly failure than one thought - the whole thing bears the stamp of WSC, a good idea badly executed'.[130] The position was not aided following the presentation to the High

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[126] WHC, 24 September 1940, DO121/9; WM(40)259, 26 September 1940, CAB65/16

[127] Eden to Churchill, 18 September 1940, PREM3/63/13; ibid. Eden to Churchill, 20 September 1940

[128] Bruce to Menzies, 26 September 1940, DAFP III; ibid., Menzies to Churchill, 29 September 1940; minute, September 1940, Lord Bruce's War Files (AA1969/275/1); WHC, 26 September 1940, DO121/9

[129] Churchill to Menzies, 2 October 1940, DO35/1003/11/1/74; ibid., 'Note by Bruce of talk with Churchill', 2 October 1940; ibid., Bruce to Menzies, 2 October 1940; ibid., minute by Holmes, 1 October 1940; Diary, 3 October 1940, Waterson Papers

[130] Diary, 25 September 1940, Waterson Papers

Commissioners of the telegram it was proposed to send to the Dominion leaders. Upon seeing it they were united in their 'gloom', Massey complaining to Caldecote that the whole 'atmosphere left him with a feeling of uneasiness'.[131] Both Bruce and Churchill had meanwhile left Menzies in no doubt about the anger his outburst had generated in certain quarters in London. With Smuts choosing this point to pass on to his fellow Dominion prime ministers Churchill's earlier personal message, it was perhaps fortunate therefore that the Australian leader took an early opportunity to pursue a more conciliatory approach.[132] The outcome of this was that by the beginning of October, correspondence on the matter had quickly ceased. All that remained was a final kind acknowledgment to the Australian prime minister and a request from his British counterpart that he be forgiven 'if I responded too controversially to what I thought was somewhat severe criticism'.[133]

Although Anglo-Dominion relations had once again been safely restored, the episode had provided a renewed indication of what the DO faced, a department where 'life was pretty hectic and Eric Machtig overwrought'.[134] Having apparently spent the last few months sleeping through many of the daily High Commissioner's briefings, for Caldecote there would however be no need to worry about this difficult situation any further.[135] The announcement, at the very beginning of October 1940, of his move to the Lord Chief Justice's chair as part of a major reconstruction of the government carried out following Neville Chamberlain's resignation on health grounds, was well received within the ranks of the Dominion representatives.[136] Duncan, the Governor-General in South Africa, whilst also pleased at his departure, could not understand why Churchill had not felt sufficiently confident to have gone even further and removed 'some of those whose only claim to remain in high office is that they were once

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[131] WHC, 1 October 1940, DO121/9

[132] Menzies to Churchill, 4 October 1940, DAFP III; Whiskard to DO, 1 October 1940, DO35/1003/11/1/74

[133] Churchill to Menzies, 6 October 1940, PREM3/63/13

[134] Harding to Batterbee, 26 September 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/4)

[135] Diary, 30 September 1940, Waterson Papers

[136] Ibid., 2 October 1940

fortunate enough to get there'.[137] He was delighted however in the choice of replacement as Secretary of State: Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, who, as Lord Cranborne, had resigned from Chamberlain's cabinet in 1938 alongside Anthony Eden in protest at the government's foreign policy.[138]

Since before his first government appointment as Paymaster General in Churchill's initial wartime Cabinet, Cranborne had been a popular figure within Whitehall. The only exception was among certain arch-Chamberlain supporters, such as Kingsley Wood, who dismissed him as one of the 'glamour boys'.[139] But as far as the High Commissioners were concerned the reaction was decidedly mixed. Massey thought him 'an admirable choice for the post', Waterson was openly unimpressed and Bruce, who only five months before had made it clear to his prime minister that he preferred Malcolm MacDonald or even David Lloyd George to fill the role, preferred to reserve judgement.[140] Australia's representative in London did so reluctantly only because 'the view that Cranborne has ability, guts and only needs opportunity to prove himself has been strongly put to me'.[141] Whatever their respective verdicts though, the Fifth Marquess of Salisbury, or 'Bobbety' as he was known to the majority of his peers, would subsequently make an invaluable contribution to Anglo-Dominion relations. Indeed he would quickly assert himself as one of the most influential Secretaries of State to ever work in the Office.

The connection between Churchill and his newly appointed Dominions Secretary was a long-standing one. Ever since Robert Cecil had acted as an adviser to Queen Elizabeth I, his family had enjoyed a significant role in British political affairs. The Third Marquess of Salisbury, Cranborne's grandfather, held the distinction of having been prime minister on three occasions. He had also been the man who had finally destroyed the career of Lord Randolph Churchill. For this reason, according to one who knew him

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[137] Duncan to Lady Selbourne, 8 October 1940, Duncan Papers

[138] See A.R.Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office, 1931-1938* (New York: 1986) pp.258-260

[139] Amery to Smuts, 16 October 1940 in Jean Van der Poel (ed.), *Smuts Papers, Volume VI* (Cambridge: 1973) p.256; Pimlott, *Diary of Hugh Dalton*, p.53

[140] Diary, 3 October 1940, Massey Papers; Bruce to Menzies, 15 May 1940, DAFP III; Diary, 3 October 1940, Waterson Papers

[141] Bruce to Menzies, 3 October 1940, Lord Bruce's War Files

well during the wartime period, '[the prime minister] could never quite make up his mind whether to admire the House of Cecil or resent it on his father's posthumous behalf'.[142] Nonetheless, from an early age, Churchill had established what would prove to be a lasting friendship with Lord Hugh Cecil, 'the most intimate friend he ever had' and his best man at his wedding.[143]

Even before Cranborne's February 1938 speech to the Commons, following his resignation as under-secretary to the Foreign Office, the next generation of Cecils was also amongst his closest acquaintances. On that occasion Churchill had been one of the first to warmly congratulate Bobbety, a clear demonstration of the degree of mutual respect that existed between the two.[144] To close observers, what would prove perhaps more significant in terms of their wartime relationship, was their ability to 'plac[e] political quarrels in a compartment entirely separate from personal friendship'.[145] This was clearly not always the case, Churchill confiding to his son towards the war's end of the difficulties of working with Cranborne who 'might easily be ill one fortnight and very obstinate the next'.[146] Whatever the case, from the outset of the latter's appointment to head the DO the strength of the relationship between the two would often be tested. And in the first instance this would be because of the new Secretary of State lost little time support for concerns about the quality and flow of information being provided by London to the Dominion governments.[147]

The Flow of Information

Amongst the conclusions of the 1926 Imperial Conference it had been agreed that the Dominion governments would subsequently have individual responsibility for foreign

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[142] John Colville, *Winston Churchill and his Inner Circle* (New York: 1981) p.223

[143] See Rene Kraus, *The Men around Churchill* (New York: 1941) pp.72-74; Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Volume One*, p.382

[144] Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.222

[145] Colville, *Inner Circle*, p.227

[146] Churchill to Randolph, 18 April 1944, Chartwell Papers (CHAR1/381/21-31)

[147] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.193-194; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, pp.45-46

policy. However, lacking money, experience and manpower, on virtually all occasions throughout the inter-war period, they continued to depend upon London to keep them informed of events as they happened.[148] For some well-placed Ministers within Whitehall, such as Malcolm MacDonald, this was deemed to be a more-than satisfactory process for giving Dominion leaders, 'kept fully informed about developments [by] telegrams', the opportunity to comment upon, and indeed, influence British policy.[149] Even at this stage though the reality was something quite different. Indeed as late as 1939 senior figures in London, whilst publicly claiming to be providing information, in fact remained almost entirely resistant to passing on anything of a sensitive or secret nature, often to the anger of the Dominion leaders.[150]

The approaching European war had brought with it a much more intensified discussion of the subject. As Secretary of State throughout much of 1939, on several occasions Caldecote had been angered by the amount of information he discovered was being withheld from the DO for onward distribution. In fact one of his last acts prior to his replacement by Eden, was to reiterate that telegrams from the FO 'should be available in the DO at the earliest possible moment', a request with which his successor was in complete agreement.[151] An early change within days of war being declared, in some cases while the Dominions were still shaping the proclamation, was the creation of a new series of telegrams. The 'Circular DW', issued by the DO, would ultimately remain a staple source of information for the Dominions throughout the duration of the war. A daily summary of the progress of the military situation, 'of the highest secrecy', it was intended to be viewed by the Dominion High Commissioners in London prior to being sent on to their respective prime ministers.[152] But although at least one London-based Dominion official viewed them as 'admirable for information', within the FO there

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[148] See Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, pp.32-46

[149] MacDonald, 'Interview to the Oxford Colonial Records Project' (Rhodes House Library), p.1

[150] Minutes by Lord Halifax and Cadogan, 11 February 1939, FO372/3315; Hankinson to Harvey, 28 March 1939, FO800/310

[151] Minute by Hadow, 12 September 1939, FO371/23966; Hankinson to Jebb, 7 September 1939, DO35/548D/3/128

[152] Telegram to Dominion governments, 7 September 1939, DO35/548D; meeting of High Commissioners, 8 September 1939, DO121/6

remained a sizeable body of opinion which doubted the wisdom behind the move.[153] In fact within the Dominions Intelligence Department (DID), the branch created by the FO shortly after the DO's formation to liaise on Anglo-Dominion relations, only one civil servant felt otherwise.

Robert Hadow, who had earlier warned of the possible danger of Dominion neutrality, now argued that to not keep the Dominions fully abreast of events ran considerable risks.[154] Not least amongst these was what might happen should a situation arise where the Dominion governments felt that London was withholding information they deemed of vital importance to their security. Even at this early stage in the war any assessments that made even vague mention of the nature of the relationship existing between the British and American governments were likely candidates for 'omissions'. At the same time Hadow believed that keeping the Dominions within the 'inner ring of events' would bring them fully in step with British policy. Perhaps the greatest advantage though was that the issuing of information in advance would limit the need for 'prior consultation to which [they] are technically entitled as our 'partners'...and on which they may otherwise insist at some crucial moment.' But his PUS, Sir Alexander Cadogan, was not impressed and quickly dismissed his concerns in an unusually virulent manner.[155]

As the months passed, the FO's concerns showed few signs of diminishing and by early 1940, privately held reservations were now put directly to the DO in long internal minutes written by the two senior officials within the DID, Cadogan and his deputy Victor Cavendish Bentinck. From these it became readily apparent that the FO's principal complaint had little to do with the actual flow of information, but was instead based more upon a grievance that it was not always consulted before the DW telegrams were despatched.[156] They also adopted a remarkably condescending attitude

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[153] Memorandum by L.B.Pearson 'Wartime Inter-governmental Consultation and Communication', undated (most likely 1940), Pearson Papers (MG26, Vol.71)

[154] Minute by Hadow, 17 September 1939, FO371/23963; minute by Hadow, 12 September 1939, FO371/23966

[155] Minute by Cadogan, 27 September 1939, FO371/23963

[156] Bentinck to Cadogan, 17 January 1940, FO371/25216; ibid., Cadogan to Bentinck, 17 January 1940

to the Dominions, especially with the suggestion that it could prove difficult 'to avoid telling [them] everything we know and at the same time...keep them sweet'.[157] Nonetheless and no doubt mindful of its still relatively weak position, the DO was forced on this occasion to agree that all DW drafts would in future first be submitted to their colleagues in DID for the latter to approve the contents prior to distribution.[158]

Despite this concession and his post-war dismissal of the DW telegrams as never having 'contained anything really secret', Bentinck remained unconvinced. Throughout the spring months of 1940 he therefore continued to seek a broader authority in his self-appointed censor's role.[159] As the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, his rejection of a string of requests from various British Embassy officials in neutral countries, for 'inside' information was perhaps not entirely surprising.[160] However in May, with the DO already facing complaints from the Dominion High Commissioners about the 'volume and quality of the DW telegrams', Bentinck once more returned to his earlier complaint.[161] A request by the DO for information for the respective overseas prime ministers about the Vatican's position on Italy, led to him complaining that 'it might be desirable to refrain from shooting off telegrams to the Dominions containing every alarmist rumour that we may receive'.[162]

On this occasion, however, the Office had decided to take a much firmer stand. In a long note to his opposite number at the FO Parkinson pointed to the anxiety felt not only by himself but also, he claimed, by both Eden and the prime minister, that the Dominions should be fully informed of developments 'that were not out of date'.[163] Reminding Cadogan that the DO was in any case far better placed to decide what

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[157] Ibid., Bentinck to Cadogan, 17 January 1940

[158] Ibid., minute from Dixon, 18 January 1940

[159] Patrick Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary: The Life Of The Ninth Duke Of Portland* (London: 1986) p.135

[160] Bentinck to Ovey, 2 March 1940, FO371/25217; Mallet to Bentinck, 22 March 1940, FO371/25218; ibid., Bentinck to Dormer, 2 April 1940

[161] WHC, 4 May 1940, DO121/8

[162] Bentinck to Dixon, 1 May 1940, FO371/25218

[163] Ibid., Parkinson to Cadogan, 7 May 1940

should and should not be sent out, he further warned of a feeling 'both here and in the Dominions...that we are sending if anything too little rather than too much'.[164] Offering by way of conclusion an apparently veiled threat to take the matter further if necessary, an almost immediate issued 'soothing reply' from the FO suggested that the point had been taken. Privately however, against the more pressing backdrop of the collapse of Neville Chamberlain's government, Cadogan remained adamant, pointing still to the need to avoid sending on unsubstantiated information 'so that we may neither perplex the Dominions nor leave them to infer that we are perplexed'.[165] In any case, as was regretfully understood within the DO's ranks, the FO would continue to retain the tightest control over the internal distribution of information.[166]

By the beginning of June 1940, there had still been little real improvement, leading to further consultations between the departments and an unexpected offer by one of the DID's more junior members. During their daily meetings with the Dominions' Secretary, 'Special Distribution' telegrams were read to the High Commissioners but, normally, were not sent on to their governments, leaving the latter reliant upon the memory skills of their London representatives. What was therefore proposed was that, despite the extra work involved, these 'Specials' could be checked within the DID and those which were deemed satisfactory would be distributed to the High Commissioners to copy.[167] After some consideration, and perhaps mindful that even he could find no evidence of any reported leakages, Bentinck was willing to accept the proposal, although he was no doubt comforted in the fact that he would continue to oversee the selection process. And, as he once more somewhat condescendingly pointed out to his colleagues, there was also some advantage to be gained in 'providing [the Dominions] with copies of telegrams [as it] makes them think they are fully informed and keeps them sweet'.[168]

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[164] Ibid., Cadogan to Bentinck, 7 May 1940

[165] Ibid., Cadogan to Bentinck, 9 May 1940; see David Dilks (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945* (London: 1971) pp.276-86

[166] Parkinson to Batterbee, 16 May 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/3)

[167] Minute from Sloan, 5 June 1940, FO371/25219

[168] Ibid., minute from Bentinck, 7 June 1940

For Bruce this did not go far enough as he felt there still remained little 'opportunity for Dominions to initiate proposals without adequate knowledge of all the factors'.[169] But with him being as anxious as his fellow High Commissioners for more specific information about the situation in France, an agreement was nonetheless quickly concluded.[170] And this appeared to work as within a few days he was generally more pleased with the new arrangements reckoning the DW telegrams alone gave him more detailed information on war operations than all bar the members of the War Cabinet.[171] In future about sixty percent of 'Specials' would be passed on, in addition to which the High Commissioners were to be supplied with 'not more than ten percent' of 'Limited Distribution' telegrams containing information of a more general nature. The failure to alert the Dominions about the offer of union to France and the ultimatum to the French Navy at Mers-el Kebir provided ample evidence however that the passage of information was still often a highly conditional process, a point reinforced during the abortive attack on Dakar.

When Cranborne joined the Office in October 1940, he quickly lost little time in demonstrating he was not happy to accept this situation any longer. Whilst both his wartime predecessors had often shown every willingness to defend the DO's best interests, they had proven unable to make much progress on this point. Despite this being his first cabinet post the new Secretary of State was, from the outset, utterly uncompromising however in his support for his new colleagues and their proposals to supply more detailed information. Such an approach quickly helped endear him within the department where he was considered

> ...to be a man of an unusual range of gifts and accomplishments...being the heir to the Cecils gave subtlety to his intelligence, quality to his work and robustness to his character. He had nothing of the bluster of J.H.Thomas, even less the diffidence of an Attlee. But if there was an implicit assumption of superiority and even a strong sense of pride, there was never arrogance. On the contrary he had a natural courtesy towards

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[169] Note by Bruce, undated (presumed last week of June 1940), DAFP III, pp.519-520

[170] Minute from Sloan, 13 June 1940, FO371/25219

[171] Note by Bruce, undated (presumed last week of June 1940), DAFP III, pp.519-520

> all...withal he had a lively and amusing mind, with a keen sense of humour. These qualities fitted him admirably for his post in the DO...[172]

Cranborne was passionate not just in his backing for the Office but also with his support of his new colleagues' qualities and professionalism, even to the possible detriment of his own position. This he fully demonstrated within a fortnight of his appointment in the vigorous defence he made of Gerald Campbell, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa whom he had never met, against accusations by Mackenzie King and Lord Beaverbrook of incompetence. Although successful in his efforts, in so doing Cranborne apparently earned the Minister for Aircraft Production's enduring dislike.[173]

Cranborne also set about reassuring the Dominions themselves, not least the Union of South Africa and Australia, that he realised the system for keeping them informed was still far from adequate.[174] He had written to Waterson only two weeks after his appointment to apologise for the latter's not having been told of Eden's October 1940 visit to Egypt.[175] This step had apparently not been sufficient though to gain him any greater credibility in the eyes of the South African who still felt he 'hadn't got the guns for the job', unflatteringly comparing him to 'a Fourth Form Schoolmaster'.[176]

In light of the obviously more bellicose stance now being adopted by the Dominions Secretary than before, some form of clash with his Whitehall colleagues was also a growing possibility. He had lost little time in demonstrating he held few apparent fears of tackling the FO, cautioning Halifax that five messages on foreign policy received from Smuts had 'not been met by our side with a great deal of interest' and urging that

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[172] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.163, 176-179

[173] See Colville, *Churchill's Inner Circle*, p.224-25; Cranborne to Churchill, 16 October 1940, PREM3/82

[174] Stirling to Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 5 October 1940 in W.J.Hudson & H.J.W.Stokes (eds.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-1949: Volume 4, July 1940-June 1941* (Canberra: 1980) p.206 (hereafter 'DAFP IV')

[175] Cranborne to Waterson, 17 October 1940, Waterson Papers (BC631.A4.3)

[176] Diary, 4 November 1940, Waterson Papers; ibid., 31 October 1940; Diary, 31 October 1940, Woolton Papers (Bodleian Library, Oxford)

a better response be made.[177] When, in mid-December, the confrontation finally came though it was perhaps surprisingly precipitated by Colonel William Bishop, the DO's military liaison officer, and not from outside of the department.

In early June 1940, Caldecote had presented a paper to the War Cabinet requesting that the fullest possible information be given to the Dominions relating to wartime developments.[178] Now, in a lengthy and often critical internal minute, Bishop attacked the prime minister's reluctance, first privately alluded to in August, to allow information containing 'a high degree of secrecy' to be transmitted to his Dominion counterparts.[179] The refusal by the Service Departments to allow the preparation of a draft telegram based on a letter Churchill had recently sent to the re-elected President Roosevelt was of special cause for concern. Bishop had thought it to be 'in a class of its own' as a general review of the war situation and was anxious to make full use of its contents to help reassure the Dominions.[180] The rejection of the request so agitated the DO official that he now felt there to be little option other than to urge Cranbourne, 'with the greatest respect', to tackle the prime minister directly and ascertain the degree to which the earlier conclusions still held good.

Despite his longstanding relationship with Churchill, the Secretary of State lost little time in accepting the suggestion.[181] This, he confided to his deputy Machtig, was because he feared that the prime minister had decided on a policy of communicating 'as little information as we can hope to get away with and preferably then only in reply to specific requests'.[182] During the preceding month Cranborne had received a number of personal minutes all complaining about the amount of information being passed on to the Dominions. On one occasion it had been suggested to him that a stark message outlining the real figures for captured German U-Boats should be delayed, it being

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[177] Cranborne to Halifax, 24 October 1940, FO371/25224

[178] 'Information for the Dominions', 5 June 1940, WP192(40), CAB66/8

[179] Colonel Bishop to Holmes, 15 December 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/25

[180] Bishop to Machtig, 10 December 1940 within 'Information for the Dominions', WP466(40), December 1940, CAB66/14

[181] Pimlott, *Diary of Hugh Dalton*, pp.120-122

[182] Machtig to Cranbourne, 20 December 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/25

better 'to let sleeping statistics lie'.[183] With these no doubt in mind, but unaware of private discussions in Whitehall that favoured his becoming the next Ambassador in Washington, following Lord Lothian's death, the Dominions' Secretary duly sent a personal note to Churchill just two days before Christmas.

In it he argued that, as far as the four Dominion prime ministers were concerned the 'policy of sharing our knowledge with [them] contributes to gaining their confidence and ensuring practical co-operation'.[184] It is unclear how much this willingness to challenge Churchill affected the Dominions Secretary's standing in the prime minister's eyes although it would seem probable that some damage was done. Not much opposition had been anticipated from his new Downing Street neighbour, as recently as July 1940 Churchill's own conclusion being that because of his ill-health 'there is not much [to be said] for burdening [Cranborne] with the duties of serving as a member [of the Cabinet]'.[185] The oft-quoted reply sent from Downing Street on Christmas Day 1940 however appeared to be a stern rebuke. The prime minister cautioned of 'a danger that the Dominions Office staff get into the habit of running a kind of newspaper full of deadly secrets', requesting as a result that 'before anything of a very secret nature is sent out' it be submitted for approval.[186] The assessment of the DO's unofficial historian was that this reply was something Churchill 'clearly cherished composing'. Throughout the rest of the department, it was understood that there would be no changing his mind and little to be gained from 'returning to the charge...at the moment'.[187]

With the point emphatically won, there was still however little apparent willingness from the prime minister to demonstrate any measure of goodwill to his government colleague. Dismissing the value of the DO in conversation with, of all people, Bruce,

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[183] Churchill to Cranborne, 12 November 1940, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/13/8); ibid., Churchill to Cranborne, 1 December 1940; Churchill to Cranborne, 21 December 1940

[184] Ibid., Cranbourne to Churchill, 23 December 1940

[185] Churchill to Halifax, 28 July 1940, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/13/8)

[186] Ibid., Churchill to Cranborne, 25 December 1940

[187] Minute by Holmes, 30 December 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/25; ibid., minute by Stephenson, 1 January 1941

Churchill also appeared set on limiting the possibility of any further challenges.[188] As a result Cranborne's future attendance at high-level meetings now became the next subject to be tackled, the request being made to the Secretary of State that he miss Tuesday War Cabinet meetings. This was because these were held 'exclusive for [those] who alone bear responsibility for policy apart from its execution' and Cranborne was not one of these people.[189] Whilst some of his senior departmental colleagues took a little comfort from the knowledge that, following the pre-Christmas approach, Churchill 'had been kinder...in approving draft telegrams sent to him than he was before', the Dominions' Secretary had little option other than to agree.[190]

With their efforts therefore rebuffed, one final issue therefore remained for the department to resolve. This was dealing with Massey's persistent enquiries about the possibility of restoring the distribution of the Air Ministry Summary to the High Commissioners.[191] Having passed this request on to Downing Street, where it was not surprisingly rejected, the thorny subject of the quality and flow of information being supplied to the Dominions once again become a subject which, within Whitehall, was mentioned in the DO alone. But in this environment it would remain a conversation that was never far away as interest from within the Dominions mounted still further.[192] With the start of a new year and his acceptance of a longstanding invitation to visit Britain, it would not be long before Robert Menzies would again begin to campaign for greater consultation by London. But this was not his sole agenda though, as soon would become clear. For the Australian prime minister had set himself upon securing a much greater personal role in the running of Imperial affairs and the ultimate goal of a permanent position for himself in London.

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[188] Note by Bruce of conversation with Churchill, 18 December 1940, Lord Bruce War Files

[189] Churchill to Cranbourne, 7 January 1941, DO121/119

[190] Ibid., Machtig to Cranboune, 9 January 1941; Cranbourne to Churchill, 8 January 1941, DO121/10A; minute by Cranbourne, 12 January 1941, DO35/1003/2/11/25

[191] Ibid., minute by Cranborne, 12 January 1941; Cranborne to Churchill, 13 January 1941, DO35/1003/2/11/25

[192] Minute by Holmes, 13 April 1941, DO35/1012/28/1/1; minute by Machtig, 3 April 1941, DO35/548F/27/55

CHAPTER FIVE

The Role of Australia and Proposals for a Second Imperial War Cabinet

(January – August 1941)

The First Imperial War Cabinet

During the First World War there were two clear phases to the 'consultative co-operation' carried out by the British government and its Dominion counterparts.[1] The first of these, from the war's outbreak in August 1914, saw frequent visits being made to London by various Dominion cabinet ministers including a majority of the prime ministers.[2] Following the worsening of the Allied strategic position on the Western Front in the spring of 1917, this level of contact was deemed insufficient and a meeting was convened to be chaired by the British leader, David Lloyd George and involving all of the Dominion prime ministers. During this Imperial War Conference, as it was termed, and at further subsequent gatherings held until mid-1919, the opportunity was taken to hold sessions of an Imperial War Cabinet. According to Sir Robert Borden, the then Canadian prime minister, this was 'a Cabinet of Governments [in which] every Prime Minister (sic) who sits around that board is responsible to his own people'. In his view executive power still remained at all times with the Dominion leaders themselves.[3]

Although experimental in both form and procedure, the authorities in London hailed these gatherings as successful examples of Imperial unity.[4] In the Dominions the reaction was not so positive. Indeed whilst the experience allowed the respective Dominion leaderships an opportunity to claim that they had provided assistance, and even some direction, during a moment of great crisis for the British Empire, it also served to exacerbate some long-held concerns. Fears about the creation of any device through which the British government might attempt to make unilateral, binding decisions had existed long before the 1911 Imperial Conference. Indeed they went

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[1] See H.Duncan Hall, 'The British Commonwealth of Nations at War' in Elliot & Duncan Hall, *The British Commonwealth at War,* pp.29-32; W.David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impacts, 1869-1971* (London: 1977) p.177; Madden & Darwin (ed.), *The Dominions and India since 1900,* pp.34-49; A.J.Stockwell, 'The War and the British Empire' in John Turner (ed.), *Britain and the First World War* (London: 1988) pp.36-48

[2] See Beloff, *Imperial Sunset,* pp.218-220

[3] Robert Borden to Empire Parliamentary Association, 2 April 1917, quoted in Robert Laird Borden, *Memoirs: Volume II* (London: 1938) p.691; see H.Duncan Hall, *Commonwealth* (London: 1971) pp.146-176

[4] See Maurice Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-18, Volume II* (London: 1961) pp.657-663; Hall, *Commonwealth,* pp.160-176

back to the previous century and Joseph Chamberlain's proposals for an Imperial Council.[5] Throughout the interwar period these continued with a persistent and marked reluctance to allow subsequent Imperial Conferences, now held at regular intervals, to be viewed as anything more than non-permanent meetings of a purely advisory nature.[6] Australia alone argued that greater co-operation was needed and, specifically, an improvement in the relationship between London and the Dominion governments. By the late 1930s there was a growing call from Canberra that the level of consultation was insufficient to meet the requirements of the worsening European situation. Following the 1938 Munich crisis, Robert Menzies, the then Australian Attorney-General, placed himself at the head of a campaign for a united British Empire foreign policy. His proposals for a 'permanent Imperial Secretariat' were consistently rejected, however, by a majority of the other senior figures in Dominion political circles.[7]

Following the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939, it did not take long for debate about the issue to soon re-emerge with calls, once again, for a new Imperial War Conference, and even a repeat of the earlier Cabinet. In only the war's second week, following a report that the Dominion High Commissioners based in London were taking 'an unwarrantable gloomy view of the [war] situation', Neville Chamberlain had created a committee to 'consider the existing system of collaboration with the Dominions'.[8] Chaired by the recently appointed Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Anthony Eden, this group soon put forward a proposal to the War Cabinet that 'a Minister of State from each of the Dominions could be spared to visit this country at once'.[9] Whilst no actual meeting of Dominion leaders was suggested at this stage, the visiting representatives would be able to see for themselves the exact situation in London and in turn 'report personally to their colleagues on the vast effort' being made in Britain.

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[5] Ibid., Hall, pp.21-25; see also Judd, *Empire*, pp.214-225; Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share* (London, Third Edition: 1996) pp.134-140

[6] See Holland, *The Commonwealth Alliance*, pp.1-151, 167-209

[7] Skelton to Wrong, 2 March 1939, Pearson Papers

[8] WM15(39), 14 September 1939, CAB65/1

[9] 'Report prepared by Committee', 14 September 1939, WP(G)(39)10, CAB21/874

No doubt mindful of an early question raised in the House of Commons about the possibility of calling an Imperial War Council, this tightly defined role reflected the views of the DO.[10] Indeed the department was acutely aware of the Dominions sensibilities on the subject, with Mackenzie King in Canada known to be especially reluctant to be dragged into any form of 'Imperial conclave'.[11] After only a cursory glance at some of the telegrams already received from Gerald Campbell, who had been British High Commissioner in Ottawa since the beginning of 1939, Eden had been quick to agree with Sir Horace Wilson that the Canadian stance led to two clear requirements. Simply stated these were 'to be careful not to appear to be setting up an Imperial War Cabinet [and] to avoid having a meeting of this kind at regular intervals'.[12] But it was nonetheless also widely recognised that some forum or gathering was needed. As one senior member of the FO put it, if for no other reason than to 'to impress upon the Dominions that they must also pull their weight if victory is to be attained'.[13] The importance of the argument made by one leading American Anglophile, that 'the less Britain appears to be an Imperial octopus and the more she looks the mother of an independent but at all times co-operative family the better', was also clear to many.[14] Although he was 'always stimulated by a crisis', Mackenzie King was in 'a suspicious mood on the subject [of a conference]', and it was therefore agreed that preliminary investigations should begin into organising some form of meeting, but in a cautious manner.[15]

For the DO there were two main areas which needed to be addressed. One was to organise the actual agenda for the proposed London Conference, the other was to assemble a group of Dominion statesmen of sufficient standing who could be counted upon to engage solely in 'consultation, coordination and cooperation' without causing

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[10] 'Question by the Rt. Hon. Ellis-Smith to the prime minister', 21 September 1939 (extract from House of Commons report, Col.1061-62) CAB21/874

[11] Diary, 21 September 1939, Mackenzie King Papers

[12] Wilson to Chamberlain, 12 September 1939, DO35/1003/3/16

[13] Minute by Cavendish Bentinck, 4 October 1939, FO371/23963

[14] Douglas Fairbanks Jr. to Eden, 18 October 1939, Avon Papers (AP20/7/81)

[15] Bickersteth to Euan Wallace (copy to Hankey and Eden), 1 October 1939, Hankey Papers; Campbell to DO, 5 October 1939, FO371/23967

any serious friction within Whitehall.[16] An assistant secretary, Stephen Holmes, had therefore been tasked with ensuring that his governmental colleagues were given ample opportunity to put forward matters they wished discussed. This relatively junior DO official also had to see to it that his department secured representation at as many of the preliminary inter- and intra-departmental sessions as possible, a strategy clearly recognisable as an attempt to limit the FO's role. The DO's high profile was officially explained away as being necessary because it would be 'called upon to deal with a number of now unforeseeable problems'. This it was claimed could only be done if the DO fully knew what was taking place elsewhere within government. Whatever the case, such a strategy meant an extremely frantic Autumn for Holmes managing a punishing schedule of inter-departmental meetings and detailed correspondence with a large number of his civil service colleagues.[17]

These labours ultimately resulted in a series of meetings during the first three weeks of November 1939, something of a triumph for the department in terms of demonstrating its ability to operate in the face of wartime pressures. The hard work was also well rewarded during the actual gathering of Dominion Ministers, 'none of whom curiously was directly responsible for the war effort', where the prevailing atmosphere was generally good.[18] The few contentious moments resulted from attempts by the New Zealand representative, Peter Fraser, to secure some form of statement on Allied war aims, and Australian efforts to compel Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, to issue a guarantee that a British fleet would be despatched to Singapore.[19] Despite eight high-level briefings from a full range of British Ministers and a visit to the Western Front in France to see the war situation first-hand, there was however no recorded suggestion of any change in existing arrangements.

There were differing interpretations as to what this lack of response meant. Harold Nicolson could only lament that the visiting Dominion Ministers had 'come expecting to

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[16] DO to Dominion Governments, 4 October 1939, FO371/23963

[17] For example see 'Note by Mr.Holmes', October 1939, CAB21/490; Price to Barnard (Board of Trade), 14 October 1939, CAB104/247; Hensley (Ministry of Agriculture) to Price, 30 October 1939, CAB21/491

[18] 'Meetings with Dominion Ministers', November 1939, CAB99/1; see Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.197-198

[19] WHC, 11 September 1939, DO121/6; WM42(39), 9 October 1939, CAB65/1

find the Mother of Parliaments armed like Britannia, [but] merely saw an old lady dozing over her knitting while her husband read the evening paper out loud'.[20] For those civil servants within Whitehall who had already made their reluctance for greater contact with their Dominion counterparts plain, that these effectively unavoidable meetings had been carried out with only a minimum of discomfort was only too obviously pleasing.[21] The DO also, at this stage content to focus on promoting greater contact between London and the Dominion governments, was generally happy about the outcome of the Conference. The fact that it had taken two-and-a-half years of the First World War to convene a similar meeting, but on this occasion under two-and-a-half months, was also cause for some satisfaction. What neither side fully anticipated was that, both at home and abroad, this first visit by the Dominion representatives to London would have something of a catalytic effect on what had previously been a largely apathetic wider establishment. It would not take long before the clamour from elements within this group for further such meetings to be convened would develop.

Growing Pressures from Canberra

In late February 1940 the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Lothian, wrote to his Secretary of State championing the idea of re-summoning the Imperial War Cabinet and specifically highlighting the positive impact it might have on public opinion in the United States. In Lord Halifax he found an apparently sympathetic ear and in a letter to Eden written soon afterwards, the Foreign Minister readily advocated the proposal. He noted to his Whitehall colleague that 'the only real question is the most appropriate time for holding such a meeting and the practicability of securing the attendance of Dominion Prime Ministers (sic)'.[22]

Following their frequently bitter experiences during the Empire Air Training Scheme negotiations, the DO's senior civil servants were however far from enthusiastic about the suggestion. In a lengthy, and often insightful, minute Stephenson pointed to the

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[20] Diary, 2 November 1939, Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters 1939-45,* (London: 1967) p.41

[21] Bewley to Machtig, 26 October 1939, CAB21/490; Antrobus to Porter, 25 October 1939, CAB21/677; minute by Cavendish Bentinck, 18 October 1939, FO371/23967

[22] Lothian to Halifax, 27 February 1940, DO35/998/7/1; ibid. Halifax to Eden, 15 March 1940

'constitutional difficulties' which would most likely result from any attempt to 'suggest the power of decision should be entrusted to the United Kingdom War Cabinet'.[23] His colleague, Eric Machtig, also felt it necessary to warn that 'Dominion feeling during the last years has been to indicate that anything in the nature of a super-Cabinet...would be unacceptable and would, indeed meet with strong opposition'.[24] With such obvious reluctance from his senior advisors, Eden asked what course of action they thought he should recommend to Halifax. The answer was 'some alternative such as a visit to Canada', which would follow on from the Secretary of State's recent and successful visit to Egypt where he had welcomed arriving Australian and New Zealand troops.

According to one commentator, Eden's position in the Cabinet remained, 'highly anomalous, not to say humiliating'.[25] As such it seems reasonable to speculate that, at this stage, he would have been anxious to seize upon any opportunity which might help him promote himself and the importance of the department he headed. A meeting in London drawing from the highest echelons of the Dominions' political ranks would no doubt provide an excellent opportunity as, during it, he would clearly play a considerable role. With the DO obliged to look closely at the proposals, he therefore took it upon himself to approach Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, for advice on how best to approach the most difficult obstacle, Mackenzie King.[26] With Chamberlain reassuring his parliamentary colleagues of his complete confidence in the current state of Anglo-Dominion consultation, it was therefore agreed that Eden would first confirm arrangements for a trip to Canada following which invitations would be despatched to visit London.[27] With the DO still worrying about the effect of this on the Canadian prime minister, it took some three weeks before a telegram was ready to be despatched to the Dominion governments. With the department's concerns unmentioned, this informed them that the authorities in London intended to hold another, higher-level meeting later in the year, probably in July or early August.[28]

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[23] Ibid., Stephenson to Parkinson and Machtig, 18 March 1940

[24] Ibid., Machtig to Parkinson and Eden, 19 March 1940

[25] See Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, pp.151-52; Rothwell, *Anthony Eden*, p.51

[26] Stephenson to Eden and Machtig, 30 March 1940, DO35/998/7/1

[27] Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, p.40; Machtig to Eden, 2 April 1940, DO35/998/7/1

[28] Ibid., DO to Dominion Governments, 22 April 1940

Before any further arrangements could be undertaken, however, the war intervened. And with the DO making every effort to keep the Dominion governments informed of European developments, as far as possible, the subsequent German attacks on France and the Low Countries helped ensure that the issue received little additional high-level discussion until mid-May. This pause allowed a recently appointed member of the DO, Peter Costley-White, to produce a lengthy summary of the various proposals that had been advanced in regard to the reconvening of an Imperial War Cabinet. Following Chamberlain's resignation, this had duly been sent to the country's new leader, Churchill, in the last week of May.[29] Whilst Menzies was apparently willing to attend a conference, 'the obvious reluctance of Mr Mackenzie King and General Smuts to come to London' was quite apparent and, in merely repeating the Dominion leaders' comments it was clear that at this stage the consensus was against the idea.[30] Indeed South Africa's leader in particular was of the opinion that, as 'the war was only just beginning...the proposed conference was rather too soon after the meeting in November [1939]'.[31]

Having already wrongly assumed that the proposal for a meeting had originally come from Mackenzie King, upon reading these comments Churchill instructed the DO that he felt 'as things are at present, there is no prospect of the Conference being arranged, and consequently the suggestion should not be encouraged'.[32] Whilst the department pointed out that the idea for such a meeting had in fact come about as a result of pressure from London, it was on this occasion more than happy to concur with the prime minister's argument, readily deferring to his wishes. Indeed, writing to Caldecote Machtig was able to confide to him that he did not personally foresee any chance of a prime ministers conference at any time in the near future.[33] As he was making this comment a message to the Dominion governments was being prepared for despatch

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[29] Note prepared by Costley-White, May 1940, DO35/998/7/11

[30] Garner to Parkinson, 16 May 1940, DO35/998/7/9

[31] DO to PM, 20 May 1940, PREM4/43A/11

[32] Peck (PM's Office) to Costley-White, 27 May 1940, DO35/998/7/9

[33] Ibid., Machtig to Secretary of State, 31 May 1940

informing them that it would not be possible to hold a conference at this time, one which drew no response other than from the authorities in Canberra.[34]

Since his election as leader of the Commonwealth of Australia following Joe Lyons's death in March 1939, Menzies, a self-avowed imperialist, had repeated his earlier arguments on numerous occasions. During May 1940, despite his precarious domestic political position, he had been the one Dominion leader constantly willing to visit London.[35] And Churchill's response that this would not be required did little to deter his enthusiasm. A telegram sent to London from Canberra in mid-June pointed to 'the great comfort [that] would be given if some conference could occur between us and other Prime Ministers (sic) on general strategy of empire defence'.[36] Although the British leader once more politely declined the request, it was clear that this was an idea dear to the Australian leader. Indeed it would not be long before he once again returned to the theme.[37]

The scarcity of information provided in advance of the failed attempts to seize the Vichy-held port of Dakar in West Africa, in October 1940, gave the Australian leader the perfect excuse.[38] In cables received by the DO from the British High Commissioner in Canberra, Menzies' position was made abundantly clear. From the war's outset he had complained that 'the supply of information was very meagre [and] things were happening and would happen which vitally concerned Australia but about which...nothing was known until afterwards'.[39] Now a year later, although he was apparently dismissive of the need for an actual, enlarged Imperial War Cabinet, the Australian prime minister was still anxious for some form of meeting. At this he wished to discuss why 'the United Kingdom was keeping the Dominions a bit at arms length in the conduct of the war policy'.[40] His continuing interest was no doubt in part

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[34] Ibid., DO to Peck, 6 June 1940

[35] Note by Costley-White, May 1940, DO35/998/7/11

[36] Menzies to Bruce, 17 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/4

[37] Ibid., Churchill to Menzies, 23 June 1940

[38] See Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, pp.30-34

[39] Whiskard to DO, 20 September 1939, DO121/46

[40] Whiskard to DO, 23 October 1940, DO35/998/7/11

precipitated by the worsening political situation he faced in the Australian parliament. Although he had been unanimously re-elected as leader of his party in mid-October, his coalition remained almost permanently on the verge of collapse. As one of his colleagues bemoaned to a friend in London, this meant most of Menzies' colleagues were now 'eager for his blood'.[41]

The DO meanwhile continued to hold with Churchill's view, one also incidentally shared by Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, that with the stated Canadian and South African positions a prime ministers' conference would remain entirely unfeasible.[42] But the same time there was a realisation within the department that to 'discourage Menzies [would] have a chilling effect' and, no doubt in light of the post-Dakar recriminations, would be 'unfortunate at the present moment'.[43] The most obvious compromise therefore was 'to say we would welcome visit [although] to urge him to come would perhaps be going too far', and this approach was duly recommended to the War Cabinet shortly afterwards.[44]

As news reached the DO that a Supreme War Council meeting was being considered, to which various Allied and Dominion governments would be asked to send representatives, elsewhere an alternative suggestion had also been proposed.[45] With this proposal, made nearly five months after France's surrender had seen the Council's suspension, it was hoped that a resolution could be agreed demonstrating the continued resolve amongst the remaining Allied combatants to continue the war against Germany. During the Spring of 1940 the Office had already discussed the Dominions' participation in this form of meeting as it was correctly anticipated that their governments were soon likely to request inclusion within the ranks of its attendees.[46] Approaching the Dominions for their views, only six months later, it was

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[41] Sir Frederic Eggleston to Mackay, 8 October 1940, Eggleston Papers (National Library of Australia) MS423/1/143

[42] Machtig to Cranborne, 24 October 1940, DO35/998/7/11

[43] Ibid., memorandum by Stephenson, 26 October 1940

[44] Ibid., memorandum by Cranborne (for War Cabinet), 28 October 1940

[45] Stephenson to Machtig, 30 October 1940, DO35/998/7/13

[46] Ibid., 'Note on Supreme War Council', DO minute, unknown author, April 1940; Diary, 29 April 1940, Waterson Papers

soon evident to the department's officials that there was now some reluctance about even this limited proposal.

Again it was Mackenzie King who found the idea most distasteful and he lost little time in making this clear to London and his Dominion counterparts.[47] On this occasion, however, this latest critical response from Ottawa was not well received by Churchill who was now anxious that an image of solidarity should be issued. In fact he was so taken aback that he warned Halifax of his intention to 'go forward with the meeting with or without the Canadian representative'.[48] The recent critical questioning the prime minister had encountered from the Dominions over his handling of operations against Dakar was only one reason for the mounting sense of exasperation on display. Britain's deteriorating wartime position greatly added to his pressures. Italy had just launched an invasion of Greece further threatening Britain's Mediterranean interests while U-boat attacks against British shipping in the Atlantic were worsening and the Luftwaffe's aerial campaign against London was entering its ninth week.[49]

There were also a number of political considerations to be borne in mind. Churchill had only recently been warned by an old parliamentary colleague of the growing campaign in Westminster to get a Dominion representative into the War Cabinet.[50] This he had been advised to strongly reject on the grounds that '[the Dominions] would get swelled head; we are the Power House and pander to them enough already'. There were certainly signs that support for, at least, some form of Dominions conference was widening. For what would prove to be not the last time, Lord Elibank, the former Liberal chief whip, had already raised the suggestion before his peers, although as he attempted to reassure the prime minister, he had done so solely 'to induce the Dominions [to] do more'.[51]

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[47] Mackenzie King to Churchill, 31 October 1940, DO35/998/7/13

[48] Ibid., prime minister's Personal Minute (No.M282), copied to Cranborne, 4 November 1940

[49] See Churchill, *Finest Hour*, pp.422-438; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp.876-90

[50] Josiah Wedgewood MP to Churchill, 25 October 1940, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/8/122)

[51] Elibank to Churchill, 10 October 1940, PREM4/43/A/13; see Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, p.93

It was a note from Lord Cranborne, attempting to explain possible reasons behind Mackenzie King's mood, which ultimately led to the prime minister's anger boiling over.[52] Surprisingly though his ire was directed at his Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs for whom the situation was made especially difficult by the fact he had only approached Ottawa for the Canadian leader's opinions after having first secured the FO's prior approval.[53] As far as the British leader was concerned using the term 'Supreme War Council' instead of the Cabinet-agreed 'Conference of Allied Representatives' had created a situation which in Mackenzie King's case 'with his particular isolation tendencies [it] was a puddle at which he was sure to shy'.[54] The fact that none of the other Dominion leaders had been confused by the instructions sent out by London did nothing to redress Churchill's astonishment at the DO's telegram. With Cranborne refusing to deflect any of the criticism, the situation was only resolved following direct intervention from Bridges in the Cabinet Office. Anxious that the Dominions Secretary should be 'free of any blame, if "blame" is the right word', he informed the prime minister that the error lay with the FO and not the DO.[55] Whilst this led to an apology of sorts, Churchill's reaction of the previous few days had made it quite clear that the whole question of an Imperial Conference was one about which he clearly held strong views.

Menzies and Churchill

In early December 1940, Churchill's deputy Clement Attlee, stated categorically to the House of Commons that the government did not contemplate the addition of a Dominions representative to the War Cabinet.[56] Just over a month later Menzies nonetheless set out on a journey to London to carry out a 'chancy undertaking' for which he had been long planning.[57] Leaving Australia in late January 1941, just a few

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[52] Cranborne to PM, 8 November 1940, DO35/998/7/13

[53] Ibid., Cranborne to PM, 8 November 1940

[54] Ibid., PM to Cranborne, 10 November 1940

[55] Cranborne to PM, 11 November 1940, DO35/998/7/13; ibid., Bridges to Cranborne, 11 November 1940; PM to Cranborne, 13 November 1940

[56] See Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, p.90

[57] Diary, 11 January 1941, Menzies Papers (National Library of Australia) MS4936

weeks after the announcement of the Lend-Lease agreement between the United States and Britain, there were several reasons behind this venture. A combination of the continuing political difficulties he faced at home, personal unease over the nature of the relationship Australia enjoyed with Britain and more general fears amongst his countrymen about future security in both the Mediterranean and Pacific regions were however the three most prominent.[58] Widely known for his complete lack of discretion, the Australian prime minister's had previously revealed to the British High Commissioner in Canberra his resolve to secure direct Dominion representation in London, with him as 'the man chosen' to fulfil the role.[59] Although he had assured his parliamentary colleagues that his absence would be 'as brief as possible', his decision to travel via Singapore and the Middle East in fact meant that it would be nearly four months before he returned home.[60]

Menzies' arrival in London in late February was preceded by a favourable press campaign anticipating his visit which showed little sign of abating once he actually reached British shores.[61] Meetings with various members of the establishment rapidly followed, culminating in a matter of days with a first encounter with Churchill himself, the first to have taken place between the two men. The visit Menzies made to Chequers did not augur well for the future, however, as the Australian politician found his host a 'tempestuous creature' whose attire and general demeanour apparently shocked him, the haranguing of the 'holy terror' eventually sending him to bed tired.[62] Menzies was not deterred though and for the next two months he made every effort to ensure he experienced events in Britain first-hand, regularly attending War Cabinet meetings whenever possible and generally placing himself centre-stage.[63]

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[58] See Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, pp.33-40

[59] Whiskard to Inskip, 16 March 1939, DO121/46

[60] *Age*, Melbourne, 14 January 1941, cited in Day p.39

[61] *Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 1941 & *Sunday Times*, 23 February 1941, Liddell Hart Papers (King's College, London)

[62] Diary, 22 February 1941, Menzies Papers

[63] See Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, pp.63-171

By the time of his final meeting with Churchill on the first day of May 1941, the night prior to his return to Australia, the knowledge he had gained had left him convinced that all was not well at the heart of the Empire. The disastrous Greek campaign, following on from the reverses then being suffered by the Imperial forces in the Middle East, reinforced this belief.[64] The British decision to intervene in Greece has been well explored.[65] In January 1941 the suggestion had generated considerable discussion within the DO, and not for the first time, as to whether General Wavell actually held the authority to use Australian and New Zealand forces under his command outside North Africa.[66] Previously, in March 1940, it had been agreed that 'questions of policy regarding employment of the force should be decided by the United Kingdom and Commonwealth governments in consultation' and it was this last point that the department was anxious to see preserved.[67] Eight months later, when the possibility of sending Dominion troops to garrison Crete was being considered, the DO had obtained the consent of the governments concerned and it was now felt that this perhaps represented a precedent which needed to be maintained.[68]

Menzies had consequently been approached following his arrival in London for clarification as to his opinion.[69] Although very upset at being told by a senior British general, during a stop-over in the Middle East, that the Australian troops were 'terribly badly disciplined and caused a great deal of trouble', this did not appear to too gravely influence his view of the proposed Operation LUSTRE.[70] Indeed after listening to Churchill's arguments Menzies announced himself to be 'in favour of the undertaking'.[71] His initial impression of Churchill was positive, his 'qualities [being]

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[64] See Callum MacDonald, *The Lost Battle: Crete, 1941* (London: 1993) pp.87-113, 186-307; Antony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* (London: 1991) pp.30-82, 82-226

[65] Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-52*, pp.96-101; David Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet* (Australia: 1996) pp.48-59; Sheila Lawlor, *Churchill and the Politics of War, 1940-41* (Cambridge: 1994) pp.167-259

[66] Stephenson to Cranborne, 31 January 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/133

[67] DO to Australian Government, 9 March 1940, DO35/1000/110/2/22

[68] Minute by Colonel Reid (Dominions Military Liaison), 29 January 1941, DO35/1003/9

[69] Ibid., minute by Cranborne, 1 January 1941

[70] Ismay to Brooke-Popham, 15 June 1941, Brooke-Popham Papers (V/1/13)

[71] Menzies to Fadden, 25 February 1941, DAFP IV

much greater than we thought', the Australian leader at the same time taking the view that there was no doubt that 'Australia is Dominion Number One'.[72] Having received Menzies' advice, and a number of unreconciled doubts notwithstanding, his deputy back in Canberra and the remainder of the Australian War Cabinet therefore concurred.[73]

During these exchanges between Australia House and Canberra it was stated that Churchill had 'definitely instructed both Eden and [General] Dill not to consider themselves bound to a Greek enterprise if in their hearts they felt it would be another Norway'.[74] The prime minister had even reminded Eden, who had been despatched to Athens, that 'justifying the operation [on] grounds of *noblesse oblige*' was not enough, it would require a thorough military appreciation before he could encourage the Dominions to give their support.[75] Churchill's reservations appeared genuine, even Waterson recording that his attitude had been one of 'extreme hesitation until the heads of the services said it was the right thing to do for military reasons'.[76] Meanwhile, according to one observer, 'Menzies...didn't seem unduly depressed at the precarious position of his soldiers in Greece'.[77] Much of the reason for this can be put down to Menzies' focus remaining upon Churchill. Despite his later description of him as a 'great warrior-statesman [and] an unrivalled benefactor to posterity', privately he was more scathing about 'the greatest asset and greatest danger' the Empire faced.[78] As he put it to his colleagues in Canberra upon his eventual return, 'Mr Churchill has no conception of the British Dominions as separate entities. Furthermore, the more the distance from the heart of the Empire, the less he thinks of it'.[79]

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[72] Ibid., Menzies to Fadden, 4 March 1941

[73] Ibid., Fadden to Menzies, 26 February 1941

[74] Ibid., Menzies to Fadden, 1 March 1941

[75] Churchill to Eden, 7 March 1941 in Churchill, *The Second World War: Vol.III, The Grand Alliance* (London: 1950) pp.92-93

[76] Diary, 7 April 1941, Waterson Papers

[77] Diary, 17 April 1941, Pearson Papers

[78] Sir Percy Joske, *Sir Robert Menzies: A New, Informal Memoir* (Sydney: 1978) p.115; Diary, 17 April 1941, Pearson Papers

[79] Quoted in Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind* (London: 1978) p.63

Consequently, with the military crisis facing British and Imperial forces precipitating a political challenge to the British leadership, Menzies was to be found at the heart of the intrigues in London attending meetings and discussions with the conspirators. In the final hours of his stay, he made his plans clear to Lord Hankey who, having been demoted by the British prime minister in May 1940, had allowed himself to become centrally embroiled in the campaign to contain Churchill.[80] According to the soon-to-depart Menzies there was only one possible course of action to be followed. An Imperial War Cabinet had to be summoned after which one of the Dominion leaders would have to stay behind 'like Smuts in the last war, not as a guest but as a full member'.[81] Having heard this proposal and discussed it with Sir John Simon, Hankey urged Menzies to seek one final meeting with Churchill. The Australian prime minister could get 'no change' out of his British counterpart however, much as had been the case the previous October, and he departed for North America and the long trip home where a political crisis awaited him.[82]

His departure did not however mean an end to the intrigues and, in Menzies' absence, the campaign in London against Churchill soon reached its climax. During the first week of May 1941, a confidence debate was called in the House of Commons.[83] Despite the best efforts of such senior parliamentary figures as Lloyd George and Hore-Belisha, the vote was won handsomely by the prime minister, a result which can only have filled him with optimism about the relative strength of his position. Certainly he did not appear taken aback on receiving a telegram from Mackenzie King telling him that Menzies, who had just finished a visit to Ottawa, had argued strongly in favour of a meeting of Dominion leaders later in the year.[84] The following day, Cranborne felt it prudent to warn Churchill of the true nature behind Menzies recent visit, advising the prime minister that he should 'have the background, in case you have not already got it'.[85] The simple answer that came back to the DO was 'I have got it'.[86]

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[80] See Irving, *Churchill's War: Volume One*, pp.550-556

[81] Diary, 30 April 1941 & 1 May 1941, Hankey Papers

[82] Ibid., 2 May 1941; 'Curtin Falls on Menzies', *Reynolds*, 27 April 1941, Liddell Hart Papers (LH15/4/49)

[83] See Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp.1083-1084

[84] Churchill to Mackenzie King, 11 May 1941 in Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p.595

[85] Cranborne to Churchill, 12 May 1941, PREM4/43A/12

Having clashed over the supply of information to the Dominion governments at the beginning of the year, this brief reply was something of a rare written communication. This was even more the case as, since their earlier disagreement, there had been little indication that the DO's anxieties had been removed. In March 1941 Cranborne had sought approval to send to the Dominion governments an appreciation made by the British military authorities of the likely chances of invasion. Once again however Churchill dismissed the initiative asking 'what is the point of all this questionable stuff' and wondering whether it was in fact needed to frighten the Dominions into doing their duty.[87] Whilst there was no further official exchange of comments, it was clear that within the DO, if not elsewhere, there remained serious disquiet about the lack of provision of 'operational intelligence to the Dominion governments on a secret basis'.[88]

Correspondence was in any case about to increase as, although the department was apparently keen not to provoke the prime minister, Churchill's reply to Mackenzie King that some form of meeting in August or September might be in order, provoked no shortage of comment.[89] This somewhat dramatic change by Churchill was perhaps a reaction to the growing campaign in Lord Beaverbrook's *'Daily Express'* for Menzies to stay and the public support for a conference which it helped foster.[90] Reminding the prime minister of the previously identified difficulties which simple discussion of the idea alone had created, Cranborne remained adamant that 'although [he was] strongly in favour of an Imperial Conference', this should only be when it 'can profitably be held'.[91] The department had spent the last few months doing its best to dampen Bruce's anger about the conference's continuing postponement.[92] Now with his certainty that Mackenzie King would remain vehemently opposed to any such proposal

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[86] Ibid., Churchill to Cranborne, 13 May 1941

[87] Churchill to Cranborne, 25 March 1941, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/13/8)

[88] Minute by Holmes, 13 April 1941, DO35/1012/28/1/1

[89] Ibid., Churchill to Mackenzie King, 10 May 1941

[90] See Day, *The Great Betrayal*, p.134

[91] Cranborne to Churchill, 12 May 1941, PREM4/43A/12

[92] Minute by Cranborne, 4 April 1941, DO35/548F/27/55

for domestic reasons fully endorsed by the senior officials within his department, the Dominions' Secretary clearly hoped to deter further comment from London.[93]

The Importance of Mackenzie King and Smuts

The view that Mackenzie King was the critical figure was certainly not misplaced as was shown in a letter, passed on to the DO, in which the Canadian prime minister again voiced his predominantly negative views about the whole idea.[94] Within a matter of days, as the German attack began on the Imperial forces holding Crete, Cranborne himself received a personal letter from Ottawa carrying exactly the same message.[95] Perhaps not wishing to be accused of hampering the now publicly popular scheme, at the end of the month Churchill was still enquiring of both the FO and DO about 'the sending of formal invitations' for an inter-Allied council in July.[96] In a long, well-argued response, Cranborne sought once again to make the point to Churchill that the issue required serious thought. The Canadian leader was 'still clearly very wobbly about coming...and it is only too probable that faced with a definite invitation he would still attempt to run out'.[97] The conclusion of the DO therefore remained that any meeting should be deferred until later in the year, 'when the issues that have to be discussed will, we hope, become clearer'.

Cranborne had already discussed his views on the question, in private, with Malcolm MacDonald who, in April 1941, had been sent out to Ottawa to become the new British High Commissioner.[98] In so doing he provided the clearest explanation as to why he opposed an Imperial Conference. His comments also provided a vivid account of recent events in London for the former Minister for Health. Menzies, he was told, had formed the lowest opinion of the War Cabinet, not to mention Cranborne himself, thinking the former to be an 'utterly feeble and futile' body. Whilst the Dominions'

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[93] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.209

[94] Mackenzie King to Lord Davies, 19 May 1941, DO35/999/8/3

[95] Ibid., Mackenzie King to Cranborne, 20 May 1941

[96] Churchill to Foreign and Dominion Secretaries, 30 May 1941, PREM4/43A/12

[97] Ibid., Cranborne to Churchill, 30 May 1941

[98] Cranborne to MacDonald, 31 May 1941, MacDonald Papers (University of Durham) 14/4/13

Secretary agreed with some of his argument, noting it would be 'valuable for the Dominions to feel that they had a watchdog to protect their interests', he felt Menzies might not 'have ability of the very highest kind'.[99] Claiming that he was making this statement without any malice, this was not his sole cause for caution. As Cranborne quite rightly also pointed out, there were more obvious difficulties involved in quickly assembling the various Dominion leaders in London. And aside from the logistical considerations there was a serious additional disadvantage to be considered. Calling an unexpected meeting could lead 'the public here and in the Dominions [to] get the impression that there was some new and spectacular development which required immediate discussion', a possibility which was deemed 'most unfortunate'.

That Cranborne should have chosen MacDonald as his confidante was in many ways an ironic decision following the controversy which the latter's appointment had caused within the DO. On three occasions during 1941 Churchill announced that politicians were being sent overseas to fill High Commissioners' posts, claiming that he believed the wartime situation demanded that he 'appoint persons of proved Parliamentary and Cabinet Experience'.[100] After some debate about a plethora of candidates including Sir James Grigg and Lord Winterton, the decision was made that Lord Harlech, who as Ormsby-Gore had been Colonial Secretary, should be sent to South Africa. There he would replace Harding who had been forced to resign on the grounds of ill health.[101] In the case of the High Commissioner in Canberra, despite Whiskard doubting whether a ministerial appointment would be wise, he was succeeded by Sir Ronald Cross, the Minister of Shipping. The newly appointed diplomat immediately set about securing a dramatic increase in salary for himself.[102] Claims were later made that these

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[99] Ibid., Cranborne to MacDonald, 31 May 1941, MacDonald Papers

[100] Churchill to Smuts, 3 February 1941, DO121/106. Churchill tried, but failed, to complete his change of High Commissioners in July 1941 when he suggested the appointment of Grenfell, a Labour MP working in the Mines Department of the Board of Trade. After remonstrations from Fraser, who was angered by the proposed removal of Batterbee, it was suggested to the prime minister by his deputy that this move might be seen as 'providing a place for someone who was not wanted at home'. Attlee also, tactfully, suggested that Churchill's apparent intention to offer Lloyd George Grenfell's old post and bring in his son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, to replace him might 'look bad in the eyes of those who are always ready to make trouble'. Attlee to Churchill, 18 July 1941, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/34/9); Berendsen Memoirs, Volume 2, Chapter 18, p.1

[101] Churchill to Cranborne, 5 January 1941, DO121/106; ibid., Churchill to Cranborne, 4 February 1941; ibid., Churchill to Smuts, 12 February 1941

[102] Whiskard to Machtig, 6 April 1941, DO121/11

appointments were sensible as they elevated the status of High Commissioner, allowing them 'no longer [to] be treated as a mere postman or glorified sales representative'.[103] At the time though it was clear that there were many within the Office who were 'not too pleased'. Batterbee, out in Wellington, for example somewhat sarcastically wondering whether he might soon find himself recalled to London to work as a cipher clerk.[104]

The department was not however alone in wondering about the reasons behind this departure in policy. To certain commentators within Whitehall, it was fairly obvious that this represented an opportunity for the prime minister to dispose of politicians for whom he had little time. On hearing the news of Cross's appointment a friend warned Rab Butler that he might one day find himself sent to the Falkland Islands.[105] It was certainly the case that the Churchill had little time for MacDonald, the first of these appointments. Amongst the many misdemeanours he was held to have committed in the prime minister's eyes, perhaps the gravest occurred in 1938 when he had negotiated the Treaty Ports Agreement with the Irish authorities. For this he was instantly likened to 'rat poison'.[106] But whatever the reasons MacDonald in fact proved an admirable choice to send to Ottawa as Mackenzie King had first met his family in 1897 and remained a regular correspondent with the young Malcolm, whom he held in high regard, for more than fifteen years.[107]

Churchill, meanwhile, had requested that he be sent a minute with 'a case for the Cabinet stating forth the pros and cons' about holding an Imperial meeting. It was surely little surprise that Cranborne once again used this to forcefully press his argument that the suggestion should be deferred. At the head of his list of reasons for not issuing 'embarrassing' invitations, he once again placed Mackenzie King's

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[103] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.181

[104] Shannon to Batterbee, 2 July 1941, Batterbee Papers (Box 8); Batterbee to Machtig, 20 February 1941, DO121/116

[105] Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Chips: Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, (London: 1967) p.302

[106] Diary, 18 December 1940 in Dilks, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.341; Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, p.159

[107] Clyde Sangler, *Malcolm MacDonald* (London: 1991) pp.214-216

reluctance as the most powerful.[108] By the end of the first week of June he was able to inform Churchill that the Foreign Secretary also now agreed with him. Eden had indeed been persuaded that it might be best 'to postpone calling the meeting of Dominion prime ministers till later in the year, when the general situation should be clearer'.[109] With Cranborne's thoughts being widely disseminated throughout the entire War Cabinet and its surrounding departments, it was becoming increasingly difficult to build support for an Imperial Conference.

With the FO getting reports from as far off as the British Ambassador in Washington that 'considerable dissatisfaction [about their situation] was being reported amongst Australians and New Zealanders in the Middle East', the Australian leader had nonetheless already resumed his campaign back at home.[110] At the same time in London there was still considerable support for Menzies from 'a large body of opinion', including figures within both the political and military spectrums. Clearly the Australian leader continued to remain the best candidate for those in Britain who wished to restrict Churchill's role.[111] Hankey was but one of these, still confiding in his diary of the need to get Menzies and Lloyd George into the government, 'two wise old elephants to tame the rogue elephant'.[112]

It was surely little coincidence therefore that Cranborne suddenly widened his argument, to include the suggestion that the widely respected Smuts be called upon 'to come over [to London] at the earliest date convenient to him'.[113] This was a move that might have been anticipated from an individual who, like his father Lord Salisbury and many other figures within the British establishment, was a great admirer of the

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[108] Cranborne to Churchill, 3 June 1941, PREM4/43A/12

[109] Ibid., Cranborne to Churchill, 6 June 1941; Minutes of Advisory War Council Meeting, Canberra, 28 May 1941, quoted in Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, p.62

[110] Halifax to FO, 12 June 1941, FO371/27575

[111] Diary, 5 June 1941, Hankey Papers

[112] General Ismay to Brooke-Popham, 15 June 1941, Ismay Papers (King's College, London) Ismay V/1/13

[113] Cranborne to Churchill, 6 June 1941, PREM4/43A/12

South African leader.[114] As far back as October 1940 Cranborne had urged Halifax, the then Foreign Secretary, of the vital need for ensuring that Smuts did not feel his various efforts were 'not being met by our side with a great display of interest'.[115] Similar statements had been common since before Churchill had taken power. One DO official had highlighted the 'personal ties between the two leaders [which] were so strong that there was no thought of contention'.[116] An assistant to Churchill had meanwhile put the idea forward, indirectly, to King George VI that, were Churchill to be killed, his 'remarkable' South African counterpart would make an ideal replacement.[117] With Smuts now officially being sounded out by the British authorities about providing more direct assistance, his own High Commissioner in London also began to try and draw him more prominently into the debate.

Throughout 1941 neither Waterson nor Bruce, his Australian counterpart, had shown any indication of suspending their campaign to secure greater influence for the London-based Dominion High Commissioners.[118] The failure in July 1940 to inform the Dominion representatives, in advance, that Iceland was to be garrisoned by American troops had particularly angered them; as a result Bruce had even threatened to ignore the Secretary of State and make his own 'representations in highest quarters'.[119] But with the mounting calls for an Imperial presence in the War Cabinet the two men's outlook differed. Praised by his colleague in Washington, Richard Casey, for his 'sense of reality', Bruce had gone on record, on more than one occasion, doubting the wisdom of the 'impracticable' idea.[120] Although he was far from averse to intriguing, his belief remained firmly that the only sensible option was to give the High Commissioners a far greater role in the running of the war. Consequently he made

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[114] Diary, 6 June 1941, Hankey Papers; General Auchinleck to Ismay, 29 September 1941, Ismay Papers (IV/Con/1/1A)

[115] Cranborne to Halifax, 24 October 1940, FO371/25224

[116] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.203

[117] Diary, 20 October 1940, Colville Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge) CLVL

[118] Diary, 5 June 1941, Waterson Papers

[119] WHC, 8 July 1941, DO121/11; Diary, 10 July 1941, Waterson Papers

[120] Casey to Menzies, 30 May 1940, DAFP III, p.361; Bruce to Menzies, 29 June 1940, Lord Bruce War Files; ibid., 'Speech given by Bruce at a dinner for Sir Ronald Cross', 18 May 1941

every effort to keep himself close to the centre of events whilst at the same time looking to counter proposals that might threaten his position.[121]

South Africa's representative had a similar agenda in regard to promoting his own role but using a different method. With the DO asking Smuts whether he could visit London to provide 'support, presence and advice', Waterson warned his prime minister that there were continuing deficiencies in the system.[122] With the advice from South Africa House being that it would be 'most useful if as far as possible at least one Dominion prime minister were here, possibly in rotation, to sit in the War Cabinet', Smuts turned for advice to his old friend Duncan, the Governor-General. Recognising that there was a genuine need for the Dominions to be kept in touch with 'the inner circle of decision and information', the latter immediately doubted whether Waterson was 'standing up to the rush of popular sentiment as he should'.[123]

This conclusion must have been akin to the South African leader's own thoughts. The next day Smuts response to his representative in London was that, whilst he shared his concern about Churchill and 'the almost impossible burden he is carrying practically alone', he was mindful of [the prime minister's] reservations about the need for an Imperial War Cabinet.[124] Before officially advising the DO that he would be unable to come to London, in his usual insightful manner, Smuts also suggested that Waterson would be well advised to 'be careful about Bruce perhaps starting an episode in Australia which might prove embarrassing to [Menzies]'.[125]

With the reminder that 'it would be difficult to press Mr Mackenzie King to come against his will, if General Smuts is in any case unable to attend', Cranborne was now in a position to ask Churchill formally whether the conference could continue or not.[126]

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[121] Cranborne to Churchill, 5 June 1941, DO35/1009/446/1/21

[122] Churchill to Smuts, 13 June 1941, PREM4/43A/16; Waterson to Smuts, 11 June 1941, Waterson Papers

[123] Duncan to Smuts, 15 June 1941, Duncan Papers

[124] Smuts to Waterson, 16 June 1941, Waterson Papers

[125] Smuts to Duncan, 16 June 1941, Duncan Papers; Cranborne to Churchill, 17 June 1941, DO35/99/8/2

[126] Cranborne to Churchill, 17 June 1941, PREM4/43A/12

Having been given an unimpeachable excuse the prime minister finally felt able to support his Secretary of State, surely the result he had wished for all along. Indeed he now even went so far as to advise against extending an invitation to Menzies alone to return to London.[127] Churchill's private secretary, something of an advocate of the Australian leader's qualities, was therefore left to advise the DO the next day that Mackenzie King's and Smuts' inability to travel would soon be publicly announced making it 'not seem possible therefore to have much of a conference'.[128]

There was however still one potentially serious problem threatening what had proven an otherwise successful strategy. Cranborne advised Churchill that the discussions with Smuts and the Canadian leader had been of a private character, warning that as such 'it might be embarrassing for them to have a blunt announcement made that they are unable to come'.[129] A telegram was duly despatched to Ottawa and the other Dominion capitals. This informed the various prime ministers that, in light of the public interest which the issue had aroused, Churchill urgently needed to make a statement on the matter. It went on to advise them of what it was intended to say in light of what had been received from certain of them.[130]

Almost immediately this had been done, it was clear that the DO had been right to maintain its cautious approach. Faced by growing domestic hostility about what was perceived as an apparent lack of enthusiasm for travelling to London, Mackenzie King had been upset by the language proposed to explain his absence.[131] So aggrieved was he that he requested some mention be made of the entirely different nature of the current war as opposed to the last, this in his view being the determining factor which made a conference unnecessary.[132] Churchill did not however feel able to go in to too many details, preferring to merely point to the inability of the Dominion leaders to

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[127] Ibid., Churchill to Cranborne, 17 June 1941

[128] Colville to Garner, 18 June 1941, DO35/999/8/2; see Colville, *Winston Churchill and His Inner Circle*, pp.174-175

[129] Cranborne to Churchill, 18 June 1941, PREM4/43A/12

[130] Ibid., Churchill to Dominion prime ministers, 21 June 1941

[131] See Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, pp.216-217

[132] Mackenzie King to Churchill, 22 June 1941, PREM4/43A/12

attend. Doing otherwise might well have accentuated the continuing domestic debate and, as it stood, the version of events he had offered neatly placed elsewhere the onus of responsibility for the decision not to proceed. In fact the only concession he was willing to make was to offer an entirely private endorsement to his Canadian counterpart that he had been correct to question the need for a meeting at this stage. Indeed although the British leader thought it would eventually need to take place, a meeting would probably not be possible until some much later stage of the war, as was ultimately the case with the May 1944 London prime minister's conference.[133]

In the last week of June 1941 the culmination of this extended passage of events took place. Despite the continuing failures in North Africa, Churchill was able to stand before the House of Commons and explain how, having been invited, 'the exigencies of their work in their respective countries' made it impossible for the various Dominion prime ministers to visit London.[134] If further explanation was needed he was happy to develop his statement hoping his colleagues would understand that his counterparts 'of important and powerful Governments with their legislatures and the whole war effort of their peoples to guide, find great difficulties in meeting here simultaneously'. With the explanation duly delivered and the launching of the German attack against Russia, he must now have believed that the Imperial conference proposal would be allowed to fall into abeyance. Although already of the opinion that 'if there was not a war on, we would have a hell of a row', Waterson for one recognised just how marginalised the Dominions' position had become.[135] With Cranborne once more struck down by illness, prohibiting his involvement in official government business, their collective status and representation in London had reached a new nadir. One last confrontation with Canberra and the increasingly isolated Menzies still however remained to be resolved.

Menzies' Final Challenge

Following his somewhat unexpected despatch to Canada, Malcolm MacDonald had lost little time in providing the DO with as much information about Canadian affairs as he

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[133] Ibid., Churchill to Mackenzie King, 23 June 1941

[134] Ibid., Statement to the House of Commons by Churchill, 24 June 1941

[135] Diary, 3 March 1941, Waterson Papers; ibid., Diary, 7 July 1941

could.[136] On the first day of August 1941 he sent Cranborne three lengthy, confidential memoranda which he had spent much of the previous month composing. So sensitive did he feel these to be that he attached to them a strong plea not to pass on anything that might upset Churchill. This he urged because 'his position in the Dominions is tremendously strong and it would be a minor disaster if a quarrel sprang up between him and one or more of the Dominion Prime Ministers (sic)'.[137] The warning was prescient as each note dealt with potentially controversial subjects; although the third of them still remains unavailable for inspection because of its references to Menzies' activities in Ireland, the other two make for interesting reading.[138]

The focus of the first was the then prevailing political situation in Canada and it made it clear that Churchill's June statement to the House of Commons, in which he announced that Mackenzie King could not visit London, had not been well-received in Ottawa. Indeed despite MacDonald's assertion that the Canadian leader 'admired [him] enormously', there were those in the Canadian cabinet who had subsequently described Churchill as 'a cad' for the manner in which he had spoken. In the draft of his memoirs, the British High Commissioner later asserted that, in his view, Churchill generally regarded his Canadian counterpart as 'a pygmy [and] with a touch of contempt'.[139] At this particular juncture however he made no comment, instead preferring to stress to Cranborne that it was essential Mackenzie King was 'handled extremely well'.

This was in no small part because the latter had finally bowed to calls that he come to London and the planning for this first wartime visit was now well-advanced, it being scheduled for late August. This decision had not been made until after he had rejected the proposals contained within a telegram which Menzies had sent in mid-July 1941 to both Mackenzie King and Smuts. The subject of the second note, in the telegram the Australian prime minister had privately outlined his concerns about the manner in which the war was being run from London, specifically referring to the need which he

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[136] MacDonald to Cranborne, 18 May 1941, MacDonald Papers

[137] MacDonald to Cranborne, 1 August 1941, DO121/68

[138] Ibid., 'Note No.2', MacDonald to Cranborne, 1 August 1941; 'Note No.1', MacDonald to Cranborne, 1 August 1941

[139] Draft Memoirs, date unknown, MacDonald Papers (121/10/10); ibid., 'Note No.1', 1 August 1941

believed existed for some form of Dominion representation in the British War Cabinet. MacDonald had apparently urged the Canadian leader to attend the proposed gathering in London, confiding to him that both he and Halifax were intent on travelling back to Britain, an idea subsequently blocked by Churchill, but Mackenzie King was unconvinced.[140]

After a month spent reflecting upon the idea, it was once again rejected by the Ottawa government. According to the British High Commissioner this was because, aside from his already much-avowed support for the existing system, the Canadian prime minister 'disliked this attempt to drag him in as an aid to the realisation of Mr Menzies' personal ambitions'.[141] What had finally undermined MacDonald's efforts was Churchill's departure by Royal Navy battleship for his first conference with President Franklin Roosevelt, held off the coast of Newfoundland.[142] With no desire to be accompanied by his Canadian counterpart, the British prime minister had deliberately kept details of his mission vague, only telling them he was going at all because of Sir Edward Bridges' pleas.[143]

For Cranborne all of this information and analysis that had been supplied by MacDonald was invaluable, the knowledge that Mackenzie King intended to delay his arrival in London until after Churchill's return being particularly significant. This was because it gave the DO an opportunity to settle on a strategy for dealing with what the Secretary of State recognised to be a final effort by Menzies to gain a permanent position in the War Cabinet.[144] As he explained to his colleague, the material from Ottawa confirmed the conversation he had himself had with the Australian leader back in May. This discussion had first hardened his attitude particularly when Menzies had made the extent of his ambitions quite obvious. Indeed he has freely told Cranborne, one of

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[140] Diary, 16 July 1941, Mackenzie King Papers; Garner to Martin, 14 July 1941, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/27/36); ibid., Churchill to Cranborne, 18 July 1941 (CHAR20/27/38)

[141] Ibid., 'Note No.2', 1 August 1941; Mackenzie King to Menzies, 2 August 1941, DO121/68

[142] 'Extracts of a telegram dated 2 August 1941', MacDonald Papers (14/5/11-16); see Orde, *The Eclipse of Great Britain*, pp.135-136

[143] Churchill to Attlee, 7 August 1941, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/48/2); Bridges to Churchill, 5 August 1941, PREM3/485/3

[144] Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, p.235; Cranborne to MacDonald, 11 August 1941, DO121/68

Churchill's ministers and friends, that 'if necessary he would give up the prime ministership of Australia and after the war enter British politics with a view...of becoming the leader of the Conservative Party'. It was little surprise therefore that this scheme to supplant the British leader infuriated the Secretary of State who roundly condemned Menzies for a 'not very pretty role' motivated 'to a considerable extent by personal motives'.

With *'The Times'* claiming that Australian politicians were 'not so foolish as to think that their leaders can direct the war effort more fruitfully than the leaders of Britain', Menzies now appeared increasingly desperate to be invited back to London. So much so that he asked Bruce to 'have a confidential chat with Beaverbrook' to assess his prospects.[145] Despite Cranborne's fears and his absence from London, Churchill was fully aware however of all of that was happening.[146] Indeed in his terse reply to an enquiry from the War Cabinet in London, which had again debated the matter, about the renewed possibility of holding a meeting of Dominion prime ministers, he made it only too clear that he was not about to let Menzies profit from the situation.[147] Peter Fraser, the New Zealand leader, was already paying a visit to London to meet the British government, Smuts was in Cairo and Mackenzie King was due in Britain before the month's end, but in replying to his deputy, Clement Attlee, Churchill categorically dismissed the idea. He also took the opportunity to mention his amazement over why his colleagues would 'think why we should be justified in summoning [Menzies] half way round the world by air for only three or four days conference'.[148]

The DO meanwhile continued to do all that it could to support the prime minister's firm stance. At the same time although perhaps reluctant to tell Churchill the extent of Menzies' intrigues, the Dominions Secretary appears now to have become reconciled to discussing the scheme with his close colleagues. This was apparent in a minute he sent to Eden in mid-August, one of the so-called 'Yes-Men' whom Menzies had so

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[145] *The Times*, 13 August 1941, Liddell Hart Papers; Menzies to Bruce, 8 August 1941 in W.J.Hudson & H.J.W.Stokes (eds.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-1949: Volume 5, July 1941 - June 1942* (Canberra: 1982) (hereafter 'DAFP V')

[146] Cranborne to MacDonald, 11 August 1941, DO121/68

[147] WM82(41), 13 August 1941, CAB65/19

[148] Attlee to Churchill, 14 August 1941, PREM4/43A/12; ibid., Churchill to Attlee, 1 August 1941

indiscreetly referred to on numerous occasions.'[149] Having been earlier sounded out by Cranborne as to his thoughts, the potential constitutional problems that any move to include Menzies in the War Cabinet might entail were now highlighted.[150] It was also made quite clear that the Australian leader's motivation had little to do with just support of Imperial interests. Eden was clearly concerned by what he heard, his secretary Oliver Harvey noting his particular worries about Menzies' potential return to London and a likely attempt 'to [try and] get into English politics via the War Cabinet'.[151]

Following the conclusion of his meeting with Roosevelt and his return to London, one of Churchill's first acts was to despatch a telegram to Canberra.[152] In it he made it unmistakably clear to Menzies that, were he to decide to visit London once again, he would only be permitted to attend the War Cabinet in the same manner as with his earlier visit. And in so doing this privilege would only be extended to him so long as he remained as Australian leader. This final point perhaps reflected the degree to which Menzies' increasingly tenuous hold over his political position in Canberra had become common knowledge.[153] Now a subject of widespread debate in Whitehall, common agreement amongst some of the 'Yes-Men' held that he only had himself to blame.[154]

With events in the Australian capital moving towards their conclusion, Mackenzie King was arriving in London. As MacDonald had once again taken the opportunity to point out to Cranborne just days before, the Canadian prime minister had been consistently supportive of his British counterpart throughout the long-running affair.[155] The High Commissioner in Ottawa hoped his Secretary of State would be sure to mention this loyalty to Churchill if the opportunity arose. Although oblivious to this dialogue taking

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[149] Diary, 14 April 1941, Menzies Papers; Diary, 17 April 1941, Pearson Papers; Diary, 1 May 1941, Hankey Papers

[150] DO to Eden, 14 August 1941, FO954/4

[151] Diary, 15 August 1941, Harvey Papers (British Library, London) ADD.MD.56398

[152] Churchill to Menzies, 18 August 1941, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/38/112)

[153] Diary, 20 August 1941, Harvey Papers; DO to Eden, 14 August 1941, FO954/4

[154] Diary, 25 August 1941, Mackenzie King Papers

[155] MacDonald to Cranborne, 19 August 1941, MacDonald Papers (14/5/9)

place between Ottawa and London, Mackenzie King saw in his visit to London an opportunity to discuss Menzies' proposals in person with one of his Dominion colleagues, the New Zealand prime minister Peter Fraser.

Described by the High Commissioner in Wellington as 'outwardly dour and of combative experience [but] really shy and modest underneath', Fraser had in fact remained in Britain purposely to meet Mackenzie King.[156] Now speaking privately to his Canadian counterpart he made it quite clear that he felt it would be inappropriate 'to give the impression that people here can't do the job'.[157] Having been to a number of War Cabinet meetings, he told Mackenzie King he had found them to involve 'the freest and frankest discussion and expression of view'.[158] Not only did he therefore disagree with Menzies arguments, he was adamant that there was 'no need for an Imperial Conference', a view he also shared with Attlee. Smuts had meanwhile been in touch with Churchill again, championing the merits of the commonwealth system. He once more argued that 'by its decentralisation, it was well situated for waging war' and where 'diffused leadership in all parts is blessing rather than a handicap'.[159] With this message there was now confirmation that three of the four Dominion prime ministers agreed with the British prime minister that no justification existed for calling a conference at this stage.[160]

Menzies had however left himself with little option other than to press forward. And with a marked deterioration in relations with Japan, he had finally managed to secure support from his cabinet colleagues that he should return to London to seek some form of Dominion representation in the British War Cabinet.[161] But as he did so Mackenzie King and Churchill were moving closer and closer to one another, the Canadian

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[156] Batterbee to Cranborne, 29 April 1941, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/1)

[157] Diary, 30 June 1941, Waterson Papers

[158] Diary, 22 August 1941, Mackenzie King Papers

[159] Smuts to Churchill, 23 August 1941, DO35/1009/446/1/38

[160] Attlee to Churchill, 14 August 1941, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/23)

[161] J.J.Dedman, 'Defence Policy Decisions Before Pearl Harbor', Australian Journal of Politics and History, Number 13 (1967), pp.343-344; Australian Cabinet Minutes (Volume 7), 19 August 1941, (Australian Archives, Canberra) CRS A2697; Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People* (Canberra: 1973) pp.495-496

reassuring his host that 'we [in Canada] were more in sympathy with the views of the UK government than we were for example with the views of Australia'.[162] This sentiment was strongly agreed with by Massey who, during recent months, had somewhat assiduously kept himself at a distance from the conspiracies of certain of his fellow High Commissioners'.[163] Attending a luncheon given in Mackenzie King's honour, he afterwards noted that the on-going controversy had been 'an entirely false issue...only really promoted by those who want to use it as a means to reorganise the War Cabinet here'.[164] Later he would record how glad he was that it had been his prime minister who had 'given the quietus to the ill-thought out proposal...which has been marked by such woolly thinking'.[165] Indeed so good were relations between the two leaders that Mackenzie King felt he 'would [not] be betraying any trust but rather doing my duty' in orally sharing the private memorandum that Menzies had sent him some five weeks before.[166] Only later would he ask that his part not be recorded formally as he didn't want Menzies 'to think I had not been square with him'.[167]

With the Australian leaders' plans blocked in London the outlook for him seemed hopeless and the untenable nature of his situation was, in fact, soon fully demonstrated. Although he had the backing of his cabinet for his plans, the influential Advisory War Council was less enamoured and with an even division in the House of Representatives, his detractors in the opposition were able to reject his last pleas to be allowed to travel back to London.[168] According to Cross 'Ministers [had] desired to part with him on various grounds, including bitter personal enmities, ambitions of would be successors, Menzies' alleged lack of capacity for decision and action, and his lack of popular appeal'.[169] When he had been sworn into office in April 1939 Menzies had expected his government to last for only six weeks. But in the crucible of domestic

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[162] Diary, 22 August 1941, Mackenzie King Papers

[163] WHC, 22 August 1941, DO121/11

[164] Diary, 22 August 1941, Massey Papers

[165] Massey to Pearson, 12 September 1941, Pearson Papers

[166] Diary, 24 August 1941, Mackenzie King Papers

[167] Ibid., 5 September 1941

[168] See A.W.Martin, *Robert Menzies, A Life: Volume One* (Melbourne: 1993) pp.364-365

[169] Cross to Cranborne, 13 August 1941, CAB120/20

politics, with the media constantly challenging his abilities, his opponents could now no longer be silenced and the Australian prime minister was finally forced to resign.[170]

Although he remained privately 'quite outspoken about Menzies' zeal to get to London instead of staying with his own people', in front of his colleagues and with the challenge at an end, Churchill was now somewhat less angry. He quickly contacted his former adversary, now reduced to the role of Minister for Coordination of Defence, to offer his thanks 'for the courage you showed and the help you gave...during these two terrible years'.[171] About the Australian High Commissioner on the other hand, whose fellow South African agitator was already preparing to recant some of his previous errors to Smuts, he was less generous. Bruce was 'an able fellow but a troublesome sort', an indication of the degree to which Churchill may have felt some of Menzies' resolve had originated in London.[172] There were however few doubts though about the heartfelt thanks that Mackenzie King received from Churchill for his assistance upon his eventual return to Ottawa.[173]

The Canadian prime minister was not the only person to emerge from the episode with his reputation enhanced. From early May onwards when he had first learnt of the full extent of Menzies' ambitions, Cranborne had maintained a scrupulously supportive stance of his prime minister. Irrespective of whether this had actually improved his somewhat damaged relationship with Churchill or not, it is clear that the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs had not viewed this episode as an opportunity to 'mend fences'. Instead, more than anything, he was just glad to see an end to it writing to a close Whitehall friend on the last day of August that it was better that the threat from Menzies had been removed. The Australian had made 'more of a hash of things than one would have thought possible' but throughout the summer months his 'intriguing [had been] a constant danger'.[174] It is likely that Cranborne would have been even

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[170] See Menzies, *Afternoon Light* (London: 1967), pp.14, 52-54; Martin, *Menzies,* pp.373-378

[171] Churchill to Menzies, 29 August 1941, DO121/19

[172] Ibid., Churchill to Menzies, 28 August 1941; Waterson to Smuts, 30 August 1941, Waterson Papers

[173] Diary, 5 September 1941, Mackenzie King Papers; ibid., 16 October 1941; Churchill to Athlone, 12 September 1941, PREM4/44/10

[174] Cranborne to Emrys-Evans, 31 August 1941, Emrys-Evans Papers (British Library, London) ADD.MS.58240

more appreciative of the outcome if he had known the degree to which his father had been involved in the intriguing. The elderly Lord Salisbury had attended at least one meeting with Hankey earlier in the summer where he had agreed that Menzies 'would be useful'.[175]

Within the DO anxiety was however fixed on how the department should proceed if the new prime minister in Canberra demanded the right to send a minister to sit in the War Cabinet. This was 'an obviously impossible proposition', even to Dominion observers in London.[176] And it is transpired the Office would not have to wait long for an answer.

[175] Diary, 6 June 1941, Hankey Papers

[176] Diary, 25 August 1941, Waterson Papers

CHAPTER SIX

The Approach of the Pacific War and the 'Inexcusable Betrayal'

(September 1941 – February 1942)

Calm Before the Storm?: The Fadden 'Rump' Government

In terms of Australia's domestic affairs, the period immediately prior to Robert Menzies' enforced departure from the centre of political life was a tempestuous one. Arriving back in Canberra in late May 1941, the Australian leader soon found himself facing immense pressure over the situation which had developed in the Middle East. During his visit to the UK, the DO had attempted to keep him as fully informed as possible. But the news just days after his return that Crete had finally fallen with the surrender of thousands of Australian, New Zealand and British troops, left Menzies looking 'about as happy as a sailor on a horse'.[1] Also aware that the 9th Australian Division was surrounded in the North African port of Tobruk, his mood would not have been helped by reports that insufficient logistics support had been provided to Australia's forces throughout Operation LUSTRE. This claim had also been reported in the country's media along with the assessment that it had significantly contributed to the operation's eventual defeat, greatly embittering Australian public opinion.[2] It was perhaps hardly surprising therefore that, following the completion of the Syrian campaign in late July 1941, the Australian government requested that its remaining troops in the Middle East be brought together to operate as one force.[3] Seeing to it that this happened and securing Britain's agreement that an Australian ministerial representative be allowed to attend the War Cabinet, were therefore the two key tests for Menzies' successor.[4]

It was as a compromise candidate that, in October 1940, Arthur Fadden had been appointed to become leader of the Country Party. As a result he had been made Treasurer in Menzies' coalition government and ultimately, during his colleague's London visit earlier in 1941, acting prime minister. In the view of Ronald Cross, the British High Commissioner, 'you couldn't meet a better chap in a bar [than Fadden]...streams of rollicking smut...good-natured, shrewd, likeable [and] means

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[1] Cranborne to Churchill, 22 April 1941, PREM3/206/1-3; see Sir Arthur Fadden, *They Called Me Artie* (Melbourne: 1969) pp.58-59; Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Australia: 1992) pp.250-251

[2] See Day, *The Great Betrayal*, pp.153-155; David Horner, *High Command: Australia's Struggle for an Independent War Strategy, 1939-1945* (Sydney: 1992) pp.100-113; Halifax to FO, 12 June 1941, FO371/27575

[3] Menzies to Churchill, 20 July 1941, DAFP V

[4] Fadden to Bruce, 29 August 1941, DAFP V

well'.[5] To many of his political colleagues he was in fact a natural choice for leader, regarded as a much safer and more popular individual to lead than the incumbent. There is even some suggestion that he might have encouraged this view, working at the head of the Canberra-based conspiracy which helped bring about Menzies' eventual downfall.[6]

Whilst he may have liked him on a personal basis, on a professional level Cross however warned his colleagues in the DO that Australia's new leader had 'hardly any real thoughts of his own'.[7] Fadden also faced a parliamentary that refused to form a 'national' government and was clearly restless for further change. Indeed, with the new government entirely dependent on the support of two Independent MPs, like its predecessor, the forthcoming Budget debate which had to be concluded in September 1941 seemed to offer every opportunity for the Labour Party to challenge for power.[8] With such frailty it was surely little surprise that many contemporary observers saw the new administration as, at best, a stopgap measure, the common held view being that it would only be 'a matter of time before the Government would be in Curtin's hands'.[9]

Despite the obvious weakness of his position, Fadden nonetheless lost little time in tackling relations with Britain. His High Commissioner in London had already advised him that the government there were opposed to the admission of anybody, other than a prime minister, into the War Cabinet and he had suggested that the matter be dropped.[10] Fadden's first act though was to inform Churchill that he wished to send an Australian minister on a special mission to argue his country's point of view.[11] Britain's leader had apparently anticipated such a move once it had become clear that a change

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[5] Cross to Cranborne, 20 January 1942, Emrys-Evans Papers

[6] See Martin, *Menzies*, pp.364-365

[7] Cross to Cranborne, 20 January 1942, Emrys-Evans Papers

[8] See Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, pp.505-507

[9] Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon* (London: 1963) p.298

[10] Bruce to Fadden, 29 August 1941, Lord Bruce War Files

[11] Bruce to Fadden, 29 August 1941, DAFP V

in leadership in Canberra was imminent, and he had begun drafting a lengthy response well in advance.[12] Although the DO had little input in its preparation, this carried the department's full support. First congratulating the new Australian leader on his appointment, it then went on to repeat what had previously been said to Menzies.[13] Each of the Dominions had already been asked to register their views on the subject and, aside from Australia, all had replied that they did 'not desire...representation [and were] well content with present arrangements'. As far as Churchill was concerned therefore, he was happy for Fadden to send anybody he wished as a 'special envoy'. This visitor would be treated with 'utmost consideration and honour', however, they would have no special access to the War Cabinet.

Even according to one of the Dominions' representatives in London, who had himself previously agitated for greater representation, this was now entirely the right line to adopt. The South African High Commissioner had come to believe that anybody other than a Dominions prime minister would find participation in the War Cabinet 'not only useless but embarrassing since [it] is an executive body and cannot wait whilst a member refers things to another body for instructions'.[14] Although not entirely certain about the merits of 'the British PM telling the Australian PM where to get off', Waterson therefore hoped that Fadden would take Churchill's comments in the 'right spirit'.[15] He nonetheless privately urged his own prime minister to consider making 'tactful representations' to his new Australian counterpart to stop 'rocking the boat'.[16] Smuts was reluctant to intervene however, believing that Mackenzie King, who was still in London, would be far better placed to 'forestall the trouble' of potentially 'awkward constitutional questions'.

Whilst this discussion was going on Churchill had followed up on his earlier stiffly worded message to Fadden with a much more restrained dispatch. In it he attempted again to reassure the Australian government with the promise that Britain 'would never

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[12] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.211

[13] Churchill to Fadden, 29 August 1941, PREM4/50/4A

[14] Waterson to Smuts, 30 August 1941, Waterson Papers

[15] Ibid., Diary, 2 September 1941

[16] Ibid., Waterson to Smuts, 30 August 1941; Smuts to Waterson, 2 September 1941

let you down if real danger comes'.[17] This appeared to have some helpful effect as, in response, Fadden offered the barest suggestion of an apology. Indeed his explanation for the earlier confrontational telegram was that 'when a threat comes closely home, local security is the predominant thought in people's minds'.[18] If this was an attempt at developing a more conciliatory line, however, it did not last long. The following day, Australia's new leader once more returned to his earlier position and, for support, he now highlighted discussions which had taken place during the 1937 Imperial Conference, in so doing effectively issuing an ultimatum to London.[19] Although neither the Union of South Africa nor Canada had endorsed it, the Australian delegates at the meeting four years before apparently thought they had secured a firm commitment from the Committee of Imperial Defence. This was that, in wartime, Dominion representation at the heart of the Empire would be broadened to offer them a greater say. Although appreciative of the efforts made by the Dominions' Secretary, the authorities in Canberra were now prepared to attempt to apply this interpretation as liberally as possible. The British government was therefore warned that the point had come where 'direct consultation on higher questions is a better method than dealing through a third party who is not a member of the War Cabinet'.

With his knowledge of the wider Dominion outlook on the matter, Cranborne's views on the subject remained much as they had been throughout Menzies' summer intrigues. Indeed, following Fadden's first telegram, he had thought that the Australian government should be encouraged to say that they were 'sending an envoy on a visit of exploration and enquiry with regard to subjects of special interest to Australia'.[20] This suggestion would be as opposed to the authorities in London issuing a more definite invitation. Although he chose not to share this analysis with Churchill, he had made similar views clear enough during the previous summer months. A new message from the Australian leader entirely changed the situation, forcing the Secretary of State to produce a lengthy assessment.[21]

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[17] Churchill to Fadden, 31 August 1941, DAFP V

[18] Fadden to Churchill, 4 September 1941, DO35/1010/476/3/30

[19] Fadden to Churchill, 5 September 1941, DO35/999/8/15

[20] Cranborne to Churchill, 4 September 1941, PREM4/50/5

[21] Cranborne to Churchill, 6 September 1941, DO35/999/8/13

According to Cranborne, whilst it would have been more convenient if the authorities in Canberra had chosen to adopt the same attitude as the other Dominion governments, they had not, and the British War Cabinet was now faced with a potentially far-reaching question. Simply put this was whether 'constitutional niceties or considerations of political convenience [could] override the fundamental strength of [Australia's] claim'. To reject such a request would 'leave a sense of rankling injustice' which might affect the Australian war effort and, worse, 'could endure long after the war is over and poison the relations between the two countries'. Reluctantly therefore, and with the acknowledgement that both the two previous Australian leaders had deliberately pushed Whitehall into a corner, Cranborne could only recommend that Fadden's modified proposal be accepted.

As might have been expected, given previous instances involving an ultimatum, Churchill quickly became angered and even perhaps a little flustered, his reply revealing an ignorance of the new Australian prime minister's name.[22] But whilst Fadden had crassly misread the mood in London, an irate Churchill nonetheless appeared to fully grasp the need 'to treat these people, who are politically embarrassed but...sending a splendid army into the field, with the utmost consideration'. He therefore authorised that the necessary arrangements be made to receive Sir Earle Page, the former leader of the Country Party, who had already unanimously been selected by the Australian cabinet to be the first visiting representative.[23] It was clearly stipulated, however, that his involvement in discussions in the British War Cabinet would be restricted solely to those matters which concerned Australian interests.

In the DO, where it was generally agreed that this was the best course to follow, the decision was greeted with much apparent relief. There was also an agreement not to tell either Bruce at Australia House or Cross in Canberra as to the department's exact position.[24] This was because the relevant documents dating from 1937 had been

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[22] Churchill to Cranborne, 6 September 1941, PREM4/50/5

[23] '[Page] was no polished Bruce. He was a country doctor, who, having made good in Macquarie Street as a very fine surgeon, got into politics and stayed there by a remarkable shrewdness in anticipating which way the cat was going to jump, and jumping before it'; see 'Our Best Men Must Go to Singapore and London', *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1941

[24] Minute by Stephenson, 8 September 1941, DO35/999/8/13; Machtig to Cranborne, 9 September 1941, DO35/999/4

examined leading to an internal review of the accuracy of the Australian argument. Indeed it was in fact clear that discussions which had taken place then had gone no further than raise the possibility of the 'reconsideration' of the Imperial War Conference and Cabinets constituted during the First World War.[25] Australian arguments were clearly therefore based on an entirely inaccurate premise. As the matter appeared to have been resolved for now it was felt it would be best to move on and welcome Page in order to 'satisfy Mr Fadden and Australian public opinion'.[26] The prime minister in Canberra had therefore successfully secured his first objective. His second still remained outstanding.[27]

Following another approach by Menzies in August 1941, Churchill had signalled that he had few real objections to seeing Australian forces combined together. He reiterated however that he would be extremely loathe to allow any movements which affected the garrison at Tobruk.[28] The importance of the town lay in the fact that, apart from the much smaller facilities at Benghazi, it represented the only satisfactory port along a thousand miles of North African coastline. In April 1941, an unanticipated German advance into Cyrenaica had isolated the 9th Australian Division, the 18th Brigade of the 7th Australian Division and some British troops. This remained the case throughout the summer despite the best efforts of General Thomas Blamey, the GOC Australian Imperial Forces (Middle East). Having been appointed as Deputy Commander-in Chief Middle East at the end of April 1941, the agenda he subsequently pursued was to secure greater access to information and bring about the aggregation of Australian forces within the region.[29] His claims that his troops in Tobruk were no longer medically capable of defending the town and should therefore be replaced was however somewhat dubious in substance.[30]

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[25] Minute by Stephenson, 8 September 1941, DO35/999/8/13

[26] Cranborne to Machtig, 10 September 1941, DO35/999/4

[27] See Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, pp.73-78; Sir Arthur Fadden, 'Forty Days and Forty Nights: Memoir of a War-Time Prime Minister', Australian Outlook, Volume 27 (1973), pp.9-11

[28] Churchill to Menzies, 9 August 1941, DAFP V

[29] See Horner, High Command, pp.104-117

[30] Blamey to General Auchinleck, 18 July 1941 quoted in Robertson and McCarthy, *Australian War Strategy*, pp.125-125

The appointment as prime minister of Fadden promised Blamey the prospect of greater success. Fadden at once informed his governmental colleagues that little action had been taken to resolve the poor situation in Tobruk and, as it had been highlighted by a senior Australian military figure in the Middle East, he intended to resolve the matter.[31] Doing little more than expand upon some of Menzies' earlier comments, Fadden therefore advised Churchill that he wished to announce the withdrawal had been completed by mid-September. He also offered a warning to London of the consequences of inaction and 'any catastrophe occur[ing] to the Tobruk garrison' in the meantime.[32] With his belief that 'Australia would not tolerate anything shabby' and 'play the game if the facts are put squarely in front of them', the British prime minister agreed to the move.[33] But the condition was made that any withdrawal would only follow confirmation from his commander on the ground that this would not hamper his operations, and this was not forthcoming. Indeed it was reported to Churchill that, aside from Blamey, there was agreement from every other military figure who had been approached. This included General Sir Claude Auchinleck who, in July 1941, had succeeded General Sir Archibald Wavell as Commander-in-Chief Middle East. As far as he was concerned to 'attempt any further relief of Tobruk garrison, however desirable it may be politically, is not a justifiable military operation'.[34]

Oliver Lyttelton, who had been appointed as Minister of State in the Middle East also at the end of June 1941, was even more forthright in his rejection of the request.[35] His advice to the War Cabinet was that no British commander would have considered the idea of relief, the reason for Australian insistence being the anxiety of the authorities in Canberra 'to take out a political insurance policy'.[36] Similar sentiments were also

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[31] See Sebastian Cox, 'The Difference between White and Black': Churchill, Imperial Politics and Intelligence before the 1941 Crusader Offensive', Intelligence and National Security, Volume 9, Number 3 (July 1994), pp.413-415

[32] Fadden to Churchill, 5 September 1941, PREM3/63/2

[33] Ibid., Churchill to Auchinleck, 6 September 1941

[34] Auchinleck to Churchill, 10 September 1941, DO35/1009/446/1/40

[35] Diary, 3 October 1941, Massey Papers

[36] Lyttelton to Churchill, 11 September 1941, PREM3/63/2

shared by, amongst others, Eden and his private secretary.[37] Already somewhat wary of 'the miserable Australians', Cranborne also appeared to concur. This was most apparent in a warning offered to his Cabinet colleagues of a growing feeling in Canberra's political circles, stimulated by the domestic media, that the country's troops were bearing the brunt of the fighting in North Africa.[38]

With this discussion and the backing of various technical arguments, such as the lack of moonless periods in the coming weeks, Churchill therefore approached Fadden again asking him to once more reconsider. At the same time it was confirmed that if still insisted upon, the garrison would be withdrawn 'irrespective of the cost entailed and the injury to future prospects'.[39] The Australian leader could not be swayed, however, and, despite Churchill's 'flowery phrases', his cabinet found London's case against withdrawal 'unconvincing'.[40] Upon hearing this news the British leader at once contacted his ministerial colleague in Cairo telling him how 'astounded' he was by the continuing intransigence. He also asked Cranborne to contact Cross and advise him to refuse discussion of Tobruk and avoid any personal reproaches.[41] Only after further reflection and with the general military situation dominating his thoughts was Churchill willing to make allowances 'for a government with a majority only of one faced by a bitter opposition'.

Auchinleck on the other hand remained greatly upset by the decision to accept Australian demands and he appears to have been entirely embittered by Blamey's attitude. So much so in fact that it was only with some apparent difficulty that he was persuaded not to resign. The prime minister only managed to do this by pointing out that 'any public controversy would injure foundations of Empire and be disastrous to our general war position'. With this threat from one of his senior generals in mind, Churchill decided to embark upon one final effort to try and persuade the Canberra

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[37] R.James (ed.),*Victor Cazalet* (London: 1976), p.264; Diary, 15 September 1941, Harvey Papers

[38] Cranborne to Emrys-Evans, 31 August 1941, Emrys-Evans Papers; WM92(41), 11 September 1941, CAB65/23

[39] Churchill to Fadden, 11 September 1941, PREM3/63/2

[40] Ibid., Fadden to Churchill, 15 September 1941; Fadden, *They Called Me Artie*, p.77

[41] Churchill to Cranborne, 15 September 1941, PREM3/63/2; ibid., Churchill to Lyttelton, 18 September 1941

government to allow its last two brigades to remain in Tobruk. Despite being told about Auchinleck's near-resignation, this effort once again proved unsuccessful.[42] Indeed, Fadden was even more adamant in his refusal to waiver, leaving the British government with little option other than to acquiesce.

According to a somewhat unrealistic DO assessment, made near the war's end, this conclusion to the episode caused 'a great deal of fuss' and left many Australians 'feeling rather ashamed'.[43] There is little evidence to support such a view as, in October 1941, attention in Canberra was predominantly concerned with Fadden's future political prospects. Indeed following the prime minister's failure to secure support for his Budget proposal, the fragile nature of his government was only too apparet. His decision to resign, a mere six weeks after he had taken power, therefore came as no real surprise.[44] With the UAP no longer able to govern, the Governor-General looked to the Labour Party, which had won by far the most seats in the September 1940 general election, inviting John Curtin to form a new government.

The Curtin Government and British Policy in the Far East

Despite having been out of power for ten years, in sitting on the opposition benches and, later, participating in the Advisory Council, the Labour Party had managed to retain a considerable presence in Australian politics. The manner in which it had conducted itself since the outbreak of war, however, meant that there were some concerns within the DO about the new government's calibre.[45] Cranborne had himself lamented, earlier in 1941, that these were 'men who were entirely isolationist in their view and thought of nothing but the protection of Australia'.[46] Certainly Curtin himself had been quoted in the British press back in August 1939 as being entirely opposed to the idea of Australian involvement in a European war and the sending of troops

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[42] Churchill to Fadden, 29 September 1941, PREM3/63/2; ibid., Fadden to Churchill, 4 October 1941

[43] Minute by Pugh, 25 July 1945, DO35/1767/944/3

[44] See Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, pp.510-518

[45] See Lloyd Ross, *John Curtin* (Melbourne: 1977) pp.214-219

[46] War Cabinet Defence Committee, 5 March 1941, quoted in J.M.McCarthy, 'Australia: A View from Whitehall, 1939-1945', Australian Outlook, Number 28 (1974), p.325

overseas.[47] The prospects for a period of easier Anglo-Dominion relations were not therefore good for a department which, after the trials imposed upon it during the summer months, remained busier than ever despite now being nearly twice its pre-war size.[48]

In early July 1941 a long insight into how the DO was faring had been sent to Batterbee in New Zealand by his former deputy who had recently returned to London.[49] According to Geoffrey Shannon, Machtig was 'very cheerful and chubby and since his marriage wearing a carnation every day', Stephenson had 'aged more than most people but remains imperturbable', whilst Liesching was 'as vigorous as ever'. Stephenson's physical decline was at least in part attributable to a developing gastric ulcer which hospitalised him for two months in September, placing an even greater burden on the apparently uncomplaining Liesching.[50] The department's ability to function effectively with this reduced manpower was soon to find itself even more fully tested.

At least one report received in London from a visitor to Canberra had suggested that, as a parliamentarian, Curtin 'didn't have the brains of Menzies'.[51] Wider opinion though was generally less critical of the former journalist and trade union organiser who had been jailed briefly for anti-conscription activity during the First World War.[52] Having first been obliged by his party colleagues to take a vow to abstain from alcohol, by the time Curtin took power in early October 1941 the 55-year old politician had been Australia's opposition leader for five years. Writing to the Secretary of State some years later however, Cross recounted that the new prime minister

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[47] *The Times*, 25 August 1939, Liddell Hart Papers

[48] In September 1939 the total number of staff, including those seconded abroad, was recorded at 85 - the peak figure, prior to Japan's attack in the Far East, was reached in April 1941 when there were 168 staff in total; four months later this had fallen to a total of 152. By way of comparison, the CO reached its peak figure in late August 1941 when there were 624 staff recorded; Minute, 1 October 1941, CO886/24

[49] Shannon to Batterbee, 2 July 1941, Batterbee Papers (Box 8)

[50] Liesching to Pearson, 5 November 1941, Pearson Papers

[51] Brooke-Popham to Ismay, 28 February 1941, Brooke-Popham Papers

[52] See Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, pp.21-22; Horner, *High Command*, pp.137-140

> ...had never before held any office in any Government, nor had any of his Ministers except Mr Beasley and Mr Forde. As a wartime administration his Cabinet had the further defect that only one of them had served in the last war, and he at that time had been a Scotsman domiciled in Scotland. I called on him at once [and] found him very watchful, so watchful that I was reminded that it was an age old plank of the Labour platform that they would 'never toe the Whitehall line'.[53]

That the relationship with London might prove difficult was evident in Curtin's earliest act as his country's leader as he responded to yet another request from his British counterpart to postpone the final withdrawal of the Australian garrison from Tobruk. Although Churchill pointed to the fact that all available resources were needed for the imminent Allied operations in North Africa, the authorities in Canberra were still adamant that their remaining forces should be brought together. In so doing Curtin's almost cursory rejection effectively confirmed that the entire argument over the garrison's relief, which had now so poisoned Anglo-Australian relations, was based more on political intrigues rather than genuine military considerations.[54] At the same time it was clear that the Labour Party appeared to have entered office with few new ideas, adopting broadly similar policies to those of its predecessor. Reports to London talked of a growing body of opinion within Australia itself that did not think the country was 'yet doing all she could'.[55] This in fact continued to be the case up until December 1941 and the declaration of war against Japan.

Something which Curtin did appear to have more forceful views about however was Britain's defensive commitments in the Far East, a longstanding subject for discussion between London and the Antipodean Dominions. Since 1923 successive Australian and New Zealand governments had been reassured by their London-based counterparts that the stationing of a Royal Navy fleet at the Singapore Naval Base and the safeguard of

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[53] Cross to Cranborne, June 1944, Machtig Papers, DO121/111

[54] See Day, *The Great Betrayal*, p.188; Cox, 'The Difference between White and Black', pp.416-417; Horner, *High Command*, p.123

[55] 'Report by Colonel G.Grimsdale on Visit to Australia', 10-23 October 1941, WO208/2062; see Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy, 1938-1965* (Cambridge: 1967) pp.42-49; Ross, *John Curtin*, pp.222-223

that facility ranked only second to the defence of the British Isles themselves.[56] But this guarantee had always carried with it a huge caveat, first revealed at the 1911 Imperial Conference. During the London meetings the Admiralty had complained about the Dominions' inability 'to comprehend the true principles of naval policy' and reiterated that the situation in the Pacific would always be 'absolutely regulated by events in the North Sea'.[57]

By April 1939 increased European tensions meant a variety of previously unanticipated questions now had to be considered. One result of this was that at the Pacific Defence Conference held in Wellington, only qualified assurances were offered to the Dominions that a fleet would still be sent. The following month, in May 1939, a private acceptance was reached within the Committee of Imperial Defence that the 'Singapore Strategy' was apparently no longer viable.[58] A few weeks later a similar conclusion was reached amongst the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee. There was however no official indication to the Dominions themselves of this, indeed as far as they were concerned the strategy still held good.[59]

The decision of both the Italian and Japanese governments in September 1939 to remain as bystanders in the World War and not side militarily with Germany, meant that the Royal Navy could, in the short term at least, be deployed mainly in home and

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[56] The *Review of Imperial Defence* and the *Far Eastern Appreciation*, two major documents produced by the British Chiefs of Staff as preparation for the 1937 Imperial Conference, are prime examples of this reassurance; see W.David McIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base* (London: 1979) pp.129-131. See also John McCarthy, 'Singapore and Australian Defence, 1921-1942', Australian Outlook, Volume 25 (1971), pp.165-179; Ian Cowman, *Dominion or Decline: Anglo-American Naval Relations on the Pacific, 1937-1941* (Oxford: 1996) pp.37-39

[57] 'Imperial Naval Policy', Committee of Imperial Defence (Minutes of 123rd Meeting) quoted in Donald Gordon, *The Dominion Partnership in Imperial Defence, 1870-1914* (Baltimore: 1965) p.279

[58] Committee of Imperial Defence (Minutes of 355th Meeting), 2 May 1939, CAB2/8; Report of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee (53rd Meeting), 20 June 1939, CAB27/625; 'Appreciation on the Far East', June 1939, CAB104/70; see Raymond Callahan, 'The Illusion of Security, Singapore 1919-1942', Journal of Contemporary History, Number 9 (April 1974), pp.77-81; Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World*, pp.243-249

[59] See Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust (Australia in the War of 1939-1945: Army Volume 4)* (Canberra: 1957) pp.6-12; S.Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan: Volume 1, The Loss of Singapore* (London: 1957) pp.1-22

Mediterranean waters.[60] This also allowed the British government to offer renewed guarantees to the Dominion delegates who visited London two months later that the Far East remained higher on the list of strategic priorities than the Mediterranean. Although Australia's representative returned to Canberra with his anxieties apparently assuaged by a sympathetic memorandum prepared by the First Lord of the Admiralty, it was clear that within the DO concerns remained.[61] Within months it was evident why following France's rapid collapse, the subsequent entry of Italy into the war and the increasing deterioration of relations with Japan.

As it had long feared, the outcome of these developments was that the department found itself now having to tell the Dominion prime ministers that it was most unlikely that a fleet could be spared for the Far East.[62] The DO's own assessment had been that such news would be far from well received and the first to duly signal their dismay was the New Zealand government. Only after promises that the situation would be quickly reviewed should actual hostilities with Japan appear imminent did some of the anger subside.[63] Australia's representative in London was not so easily pacified though, complaining bitterly to his prime minister about 'the complete reversal of the United Kingdom's naval policy in the Far East'.[64] Such was the tone of Bruce's criticism that General Sir Hastings Ismay felt obliged to intervene. This he did by forcefully reminding the Australian that nobody had foreseen France's collapse which removed both her fleet and her naval bases from previous strategic calculations.

Considering that Churchill was now Britain's leader this was perhaps an odd line for Bruce to have adopted. In November 1939 he had privately noted his belief that the then First Lord of the Admiralty's wartime strategy would be

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[60] Malcolm Murfett, 'Living in the Past: A Critical Re-examination of the Singapore Naval Strategy, 1918-1941',War and Society, Volume 11, Number 1 (May 1993), pp.91-93

[61] Diary, 3 November 1939, Lord Bruce's War Files; 'Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty', 20 November 1939, WP89(39), CAB66/2; Eden to Chamberlain, 18 November 1939, FO372/23572

[62] DO to Dominion prime ministers, 13 June 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B

[63] New Zealand government to DO, 15 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/2; ibid., Machtig to Vice-Admiral Phillips, 22 June 1940

[64] Bruce to Menzies, 3 July 1940, Lord Bruce's War Files; Ismay to Bruce, 4 July 1940, DAFP IV pp.13-15; see Dixon Memoirs, Batterbee Papers (Box 20/5)

> ...to win...in the European theatre with a full concentration of our forces and not dissipate them by trying to deal with the situation in the Far East at the same time. His view would be that having won the war in the western theatre we could then concentrate the whole of what would probably be, unless we had suffered a major naval disaster, our overwhelming forces upon restoring the situation in the Far East.[65]

However, little reference was made of the subject by London for many months and even then it was made in the vaguest terms.[66] Although Cranborne was acutely aware that the situation was not 'very impressive', only in late August 1941 did Churchill inform Fadden that the Admiralty was finally thinking about stationing a naval unit in the Indian Ocean.[67] Curtin had been pleased to hear this news whilst still in opposition, indeed he was fully supportive of the argument that the key role of an Australian representative in London was 'to insist on the location of a strong force of capital ships east of Suez'.[68] As prime minister he therefore pressed that his British counterpart now make good on his earlier promise, urging him to include a modern ship.[69] Despite continuing opposition from senior naval figures surrounding him, Churchill agreed, informing Curtin towards the end of October 1941 that the RN's latest battleship, the *Prince of Wales*, would join the battlecruiser *Repulse*.[70]

Although on this occasion the British prime minister agreed, there is no real evidence to suggest that his views had changed from two years before when he had stressed to Chamberlain that 'on no account must anything which threatens in the Far East divert us from the prime objective'.[71] This represented a significant change from 1923 when

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[65] Diary, 20 November 1939, Lord Bruce's War Files

[66] See Murfett, 'Living in the Past', pp.94-95; Callahan, 'The Illusion of Security', pp.82-86

[67] Minute by Cranborne, 25 August 1941, DO35/1079/5; Churchill to Fadden, 31 August 1941, DAFP V, pp.92-93

[68] Advisory War Council Minute, 12 September 1941, DAFP V, pp.106-108

[69] Ibid., Curtin to Cranborne, 16 October 1941, p.149

[70] Ibid., Churchill to Curtin, 26 October 1941, pp.153-154

[71] Churchill to Chamberlain, 25 March 1939, quoted in A.J.Stockwell, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in South-East Asia' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*; see Robert O'Neil, 'Churchill, Japan and British Security in the Pacific, 1904-1942' in Blake and Louis (ed.), *Churchill, A Major New Assessment,* pp.279-286; see also Churchill to Chamberlain, 23

Churchill had argued that to not defend the Pacific Dominions with a Royal Navy Fleet would be 'an act of desertion, of abrogation of duty and of ingratitude both cruel and fatal'.[72] By November 1939, when he produced his often ambiguous memorandum on Australian Naval Defence, he was even more convinced that whilst fighting Nazi Germany it would not be possible to make commitments in the Far East.[73] Two years later therefore, the main reason for his agreement to now send an albeit limited naval force to the Far East was one he consistently applied during the first nineteen months of his wartime premiership. This was that the United States would ultimately enter the war on the side of the Allies and in likely 'tak[ing] charge in the Far East' send supporting vessels.[74] Within the DO the future significance of the US was fully recognised by Cranborne who also held that the authorities in Washington were the only ones who could threaten Japan.[75] The question perhaps figuring more prominently in the Secretary of State's mind, however, was whether the Roosevelt administration could be induced to use American strength.

Cranborne's concern drew heavily upon his knowledge of the problems faced by his department when handling the Dominions' relationship with the United States. On the one hand there was the New Zealand High Commissioner in London raging about 'toadying to a power which only acted in accordance with its own selfish and commercial interests'.[76] On the other however was Canada which, even before the signing of the Ogdensburg Agreement between Mackenzie King and President

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August 1939, quoted in D.C.Watt, 'Churchill and Appeasement', in Blake and Louis (ed.), *Churchill, A Major New Assessment,* p.202

[72] 'Singapore and the Empire', 1923, Chartwell Papers (CHAR8/338)

[73] Minutes of Meeting with Dominion Representatives, 20 November 1939, CAB99/1

[74] For example Winston Churchill, 'Singapore - Key to the Pacific', 24 March 1934, *Evening Standard*, Chartwell Papers (CHAR8/501); ibid., Winston Churchill 'Defending the Empire', 13 May 1937, *Evening Standard* (CHAR8/570); WM103(41), 16 October 1941, CAB65/23; Peter Lowe, 'Britain and the Opening of the War in Asia, 1937-1941' in Ian Nish (ed.), *Anglo-Japanese Alienation, 1937-1941* (London: 1982) p.113-117

[75] Cranborne to Mrs.Evans, 8 November 1940, Cranborne Papers

[76] WHC, 11 February 1941, DO121/9

Roosevelt in August 1940, was recognised within Whitehall, albeit reluctantly in some quarters, as enjoying a special relationship with the Washington administration.[77]

Generally speaking, as one astute commentator put it just weeks after the outbreak of war, the US-Dominions relationship would always be complicated.[78] This was because the Dominions were at the same time 'both jealous and contra-wise' admirers of all things American. They recognised that securing US support was a prerequisite to winning the war and consequently they campaigned hard for closer links.[79] But as they were often kept deliberately on the fringes of the discussions that gained momentum throughout 1941, they were also initially wary of the longer term implications.[80] One example was the proposed Atlantic Charter when the Dominion governments were nowhere near fully informed of what was being agreed upon by the British leadership.[81]

All of this was of course especially embarrassing to the DO, the complaint being passed to the WO that

> ...so long as the Dominions are kept in the dark, they are apt to misconstrue the reasons for our actions...and to suspect us of ulterior motives which, apart perhaps from our wish to ensure absolute secrecy about future plans and operations, do not exist.[82]

Despite this warning, discussions for the proposed Lend Lease agreement in 1941 again largely took place without the Dominions. In part this was because the United States preferred to deal just with one set of negotiators, but there was also a desire by

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[77] Anonymous minute, 30 January 1940, FO371/24252; see Fred Pollock, 'Roosevelt, the Ogdensburg Agreement and the British Fleet: All Done with Mirrors', Diplomatic History, Volume 5 (1981), pp.203-205

[78]Minute by Hadow, 17 September 1939, FO371/23963

[79] Harding to DO, 27 May 1940, DO35/1003/2/11/1/1B; Menzies to DO, 16 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/3; Batterbee to DO, 18 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/4/4; WHC, 6 February 1941, DO121/11

[80] See John Robertson, 'Australia and the 'Beat Hitler First' Strategy 1941-1942', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Volume XI, Number 3 (1983), pp.301-308

[81] Machtig to Cranborne, 23 August 1941, DO35/1002/48/2; Garner to Martin, 29 August 1941, DO35/1002/48/3; Attlee to Churchill, 12 August 1941, CAB66/18/13

[82] Minute by Liesching, February 1941, DO35/1077/281/11

the British government to retain ultimate control of the distribution of loaned materials.[83] Although arrangements ultimately improved, the minimal access initially given to the newly available equipment left the Dominions angry at the DO for 'not pressing their case hard enough'.[84] As Cranborne had campaigned especially hard for them to be included, such criticism was unfair.[85] It is however clear that the lack of involvement in the first instance ensured that there was a subsequent reluctance to demonstrate any great enthusiasm for the Lend Lease scheme.

At the same time, within both the Office and amongst certain Dominion politicians, another view emerged about the possible implications of closer co-operation with the US. This was that it would quite likely have potentially onerous consequences for post-war economic policy, most obviously because of an almost inevitable attack by the American government on Imperial Preference.[86] Despite subsequent criticisms of the degree to which he sought to encourage the relationship with the US, even Churchill was not entirely blind to this danger and what it would mean for the future of the British Empire. But there was little else he felt could be done by this stage of the war.[87]

In the case of the recently appointed government in Canberra, it remained far more concerned with the worsening situation in the Far East.[88] As with the case of its predecessor, aside from the information it received from the DO its other major source remained Richard Casey, Australian Minister in Washington. Anxious for a role outside of Australia after Menzies' promotion in early 1939 to become prime minister, the following year Casey had resigned as Minister for Supply to take charge of what was

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[83] Minute by Pitblado, 25 March 1941, DO35/1075/279/67; minute by Pitblado, 30 May 1941, DO35/1075/279/91

[84] Comment by Pitblado at Treasury meeting, 11 December 1941, DO35/1076/1; WHC, 28 October 1941

[85] Machtig to Cranborne, 8 December 1941, DO35/1014/5; ibid., Cranborne to Machtig, 8 December 1941

[86] Anonymous minute, February 1941, DO35/1074/279/47; notes by Ashton-Gwatkin (FO) for R.A.Butler, April 1941 (Conservative Research Department Papers, Bodleian Library) CRD2/28/2; Casey to Department of External Affairs, 11 October 1941, DAFP V, pp.131-132

[87] See Orde, *The Eclipse of Great Britain*, pp.129-159; conversation between Churchill and Roosevelt, August 1941 quoted in R.Palme Dutt, *Britain's Crisis of Empire* (London: 1949) p.44

[88] War Cabinet submission by Curtin, 13 October 1941, DAFP V, pp.133-136

his country's first foreign diplomatic post.[89] He had since proven a great success in Washington establishing excellent contacts who told him, at the end of October 1941, that the US State Department believed there to be 'very little chance of the Japanese undertaking southward offensive in the near future'.[90] Whilst this kind of material was eagerly received, the Curtin government believed that their soon-to-arrive representative in London would help keep them much better informed of developments. This optimism would, however, prove to be largely misplaced.

The Earle Page Mission and the Worsening Crisis

Having travelled via the Dutch East Indies, Page had been in Singapore when the Fadden government finally fell, attending a conference at which defence measures for the Far East region were the main subject of discussion. Despite the change of government Curtin asked him to continue with his journey, and Australia's representative eventually reached Britain by way of the Philippines, the United States and Canada. This choice of route meant that he would not attend his first War Cabinet meeting until the last week of October. By the time this happened Mackenzie King had already cabled the British leader to reassure him about Page, whom he had entertained in Ottawa. The Canadian believed his guest only to be interested in the situation in the Far East and he had 'no thoughts of urging any kind of an Imperial War Cabinet or representation of Australia in the War Cabinet'.[91]

Information such as this was helpful as it still seemed likely in London that problems lay ahead. The DO's unofficial historian has described Page's selection as 'an unfortunate choice' for, despite his being an elder statesman with considerable domestic political experience

> ...he had little knowledge of defence or foreign affairs, no experience in diplomacy - he was a doctor by profession [who] owned a cattle station and was Minister of Commerce

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[89] Whiskard to Inskip, 19 June 1939, DO121/46; see T.B.Millar, *Australia in Peace and War* (London: 1978) pp.137, 140-141

[90] Casey to Evatt, 25 October 1941, DAFP V

[91] Mackenzie King to Churchill, 25 October 1941, DO35/999/8/18

> when appointed - and lacked the strength of character required to stand up to Churchill. He was genial, but fussy and rather stupid.[92]

Others who had met him in Australia were more complimentary in their depiction of a 'straight, kindly country gentleman' who was 'a little inclined to stress the obvious at some length and without any pause for interruption'.[93] The media in London meanwhile preferred to dwell on 'his hearty laugh, which he use[d] remarkably well as an evasive instrument when embarrassed by a touchy question'.[94] In official circles there were undoubtedly those who considered Page's presence to be distracting and unhelpful. This was perhaps a result of the Australian having arrived before the British War Cabinet complaining of the poor state of the defences in Singapore and the unsatisfactory assistance he had been given during his journey.[95] There was also some disquiet amongst the Dominion High Commissioners who, although not entirely certain of arrangements, were unhappy about the preferential treatment being afforded to Australia.[96] Apparently ignorant of this, Page quickly settled down to address what he thought was his principal objective, influencing 'British policy early enough while it was still fluid, so that it would bear a definite Australian colour and impress'.[97]

In the first instance this meant trying to obtain an agreement from Churchill to provide reinforcements for the Far East, but he was to make little early progress. The official response from the British leader remained consistent, that whilst Britain was 'resolute to help Australia if she were menaced', Japan was unlikely to invade.[98] Although both advising and actively supporting his newly arrived colleague, Bruce proved equally unsuccessful. Indeed at this stage he found himself able to do little more than register his concerns about the British government's failure to offer any guarantee to the

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[92] Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, p.211

[93] Brooke-Popham to Ismay, 10 October 1941, Brooke-Popham Papers

[94] *Evening News*, 28 October 1941, DO35/999/8/18

[95] See Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp.310-313; Diary, 5 November 1941, Cadogan Papers (Churchill College, Cambridge) ACAD1/10

[96] Diary, 3 December 1941, Massey Papers

[97] Memorandum on 'Machinery of Consultation', Page Papers, Item No.641 (1940-1944)

[98] WM112(41), 12 November 1941, CAB65/24

authorities in the Netherlands East Indies.[99] One of the main reasons for this was Churchill's continuing commitment to avoid any action that might be seen as not in tandem with the United States. Despite Cranborne's impassioned pleas that reticence in offering support to the Dutch could produce a 'painful impression', nothing would alter the prime minister's stance.[100]

Had he known about it, this stubbornness displayed by his old friend would have come as no surprise to Smuts. He had recently asked the South African High Commissioner in London to provide an assessment he could see and Waterson had duly reported back to Pretoria. In his private note he warned his prime minister that the British War Cabinet was a formality, 'a cabinet of one who meets his colleagues twice a week and informs them of what is to be done'.[101] This description harked back to Menzies' earlier complaints to his Dominion colleagues, during the summer. The difference on this occasion though was that the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs was now also apparently in agreement and willing to challenge the situation.

In mid-November 1941, Cranborne sent a strongly worded letter to Churchill and a copy of it to Eden.[102] Maintaining the line of his earlier complaints, he warned that the point had been reached where the 'problems' facing him were 'really beginning to interfere with the smooth working of the Dominions Office'. The most serious of these was the degree to which he was being excluded from meetings, such as the War Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff Committees. The result of this had been to leave him unaware of the general war situation, a shortcoming known to the London-based High Commissioners. As the Dominions' Secretary complained this meant that 'if they want secret information they tend more and more to go not to me but to other sources which apparently talk more freely'. This made Cranborne's position 'a farce' which could only be remedied if he were given a free hand to pass information on as he saw fit using his discretion not to discuss operational matters or any other inappropriate

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[99] See Cumpston, *Lord Bruce of Melbourne*, pp.188-189; WHC, 12 November 1941, DO121/11

[100] WM109(41), 5 November 1941, CAB65/24; Cranborne to Fadden, 12 September 1941, DAFP V, pp.109-111; ibid., Cranborne to Fadden, 19 September 1941, pp.116-117

[101] Diary, 31 October 1941, Waterson Papers; ibid., Waterson to Smuts, 11 November 1941

[102] Cranborne to Churchill, 18 November 1941, DO121/10A

issues. Although no written reply from the prime minister was forthcoming, later events would reveal the significance of the incident.

At the same time as the Secretary of State was again tackling Churchill, he was also having to still keep a close check on Menzies. In July 1941 Alfred Duff Cooper had been moved from the Ministry of Information to become Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the following month he left on a mission to the Far East to investigate measures for the co-ordination of defence in the region. As part of his subsequent report, he had called for the appointment of a British Commissioner General based at Singapore and the former Australian prime minister's name had been proposed, the second high-level suggestion that he be given a new role in as many months.[103] The first had come in early October from the Governor General in Canberra. Lord Gowrie had suggested to London that a seat be found in the House of Commons for Menzies where 'his wide experience and knowledge of the Australian outlook would be useful'.[104] Neither Churchill nor Cranborne had been keen on that occasion and the new proposal from Duff Cooper found them no more receptive. By questioning what might happen should Menzies be required to implement instructions to which the authorities in Canberra were opposed, the Secretary of State was able to reject the idea.[105] Other attempts were to be made to find a more influential role for the former prime minister, most notably in 1942 when an Australian was being looked for to fill the role of Minister of State resident in the Middle East. Such was the domestic opposition to this idea in Canberra however that his backbencher's seat once more proved inescapable and here he was to remain.[106]

The situation in the Far East was meanwhile rapidly deteriorating. With his access to MAGIC intelligence decrypts, Roosevelt had known since July 1941 of the adoption of a dual policy by the Japanese Imperial Cabinet. This called for negotiations in the first instance and military action if they failed. The discussions between the two sides had

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[103] Duff Cooper to Churchill, 31 October 1941, PREM3/155

[104] Gowrie to DO, 10 October 1941, DO121/50

[105] Cranborne to Churchill, 24 November 1941, PREM3/155; ibid., note by Churchill, 25 November 1941

[106] See Martin, *Robert Menzies*, pp.391-397

subsequently proven lacklustre however, no doubt at least in part because of America's decision to implement a total oil embargo as 'punishment' for the Japanese invasion of southern Indochina.[107] This was resolutely supported by Churchill who maintained the role of interested bystander throughout the negotiations. In fact with its belief that Japan was 'likely to pursue a policy of pinpricks...but unlikely to embark on total war', since late 1940 Whitehall had effectively restricted its actions to sending vague warnings to the government in Tokyo.[108] Although various 'scares' ensured that some of the messages sent were, according to Menzies, 'good, direct stuff' which emphasised the dangers of going to war, in most instances it was left to the US to take the lead.[109]

Once more the Dominions were not always fully informed, specifically when these warnings were to be issued, despite the DO's complaints that to not do so would leave the Dominion governments 'feel[ing] that their hands are forced'.[110] Churchill showed little apparent concern about such fears. Indeed by the last week of November, despite the growing tension, he seemed quite happy with how events were proceeding.[111] He was by no means alone now with even Bruce, previously one of the most vocal opponents of letting Washington take charge, willing to accept that this was the right line to follow, along with his High Commissioner colleagues.[112] Only Page remained worried, largely as a result of a 'very depressing' interview he had held with Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff. The senior British officer had suggested during this that an invasion of the Dutch East Indies might not be enough to lead to a declaration of

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[107] See John Pritchard, 'Winston Churchill, the Military and Imperial Defence in East Asia' in Saki Dockrill (ed.), *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima* (London: 1994) pp.42-44; S.Hatano & S.Asada, 'The Japanese Decision to Move South' in Boyce & Robertson (eds.), *Paths to War*, pp.399-403; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp.51-85

[108] Note of a Meeting between Halifax and the Dominion High Commissioners, 31 July 1940, DO35/1000/1/124

[109] Cranborne to Whiskard, 7 February 1941, DAFP IV, pp.416-417; Casey to Menzies, 9 July 1941, DAFP V, pp.5-6; Diary, 31 March 1941, Menzies Papers

[110] Minute, 28 August 1941, DO35/1010/476/3/29

[111] Churchill to Eden, 23 November 1941, PREM3/156/6; see Richard Grace, 'Whitehall and the Ghost of Appeasement: November 1941', Diplomatic History, Volume 3 (1979), pp.173-191

[112] WHC, 24 November 1941, DO121/11

war by London.[113] His guest had been horrified at the idea, warning that if nothing happened it would demonstrate how little Australia's and New Zealand's feelings were understood and 'break the Empire'. This message was duly passed on to Churchill along with a warning of the potential for 'a very serious breach in empire relations'.[114] But without any sign of American support there continued to be no response from the prime minister despite the growing evidence now beginning to accumulate in the last days of November 1941 that Japan was poised to attack southwards.[115]

In light of this continuing intransigence, where the Far East was concerned a surprising inclination to 'follow father' appears to have emerged throughout the Dominions.[116] New Zealand's voice was still only rarely raised and even more rarely heard. Meanwhile 'rampant personal quarrels' and other domestic distractions remained broadly to the fore in Canada. The same was also the case in the Union of South Africa where the destruction of the country's Fifth Infantry Brigade during action at Sidi Rezegh had reignited violent internal debate. But perhaps the greatest revelation was the degree to which even the Australian government had fallen noticeably more in line with British thinking.[117]

Curtin and his fellow ministers had found many distractions in assuming office, and generally positive messages from London and various British visitors had helped ease fears of a possible Japanese attack.[118] Such was the growing optimism that parliament was told in early November there was no desire by the government to recall the AIF. At the same time an earlier decision to send an Armoured Division to the Middle East

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[113] Diary, 18 November 1941, Page Papers

[114] Attlee to Churchill, 20 November 1941, DO121/10B

[115] WM122(41), 1 December 1941, CAB65/24; de-cyphered Japanese document, 30 November 1941, HW1/288; Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pp.1259-1267

[116] Brigadier Ivan Simson to Liddell Hart, 26 June 1968, Liddell Hart Papers (LH9/31/41a)

[117] Harlech to Churchill, 2 October 1941, PREM4/44/1; see Beloff, *Dream of Commonwealth*, pp.348-360; Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, pp.268-295; Martin & Orpen, *South Africa at War, Vol.7*, pp.124-125, 132-133; Smuts, *Jan Christian Smuts*, pp.415-416

[118] See Day, *The Great Betrayal*, pp.192-202; Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, pp.75-77; Henry Probert, 'British Strategy and the Far East War, 1941-1945' in Nish (ed.), *Anglo Japanese Alienation, 1919-1952*, p.161; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, pp.120-123

was also confirmed.[119] Announcements such as these perhaps helped to explain why the complacency amongst the Australian public, which British High Commissioners had referred to in the past, had if anything become worse. General Blamey on his November visit was shocked at what he saw, warning that his countrymen had become 'like a herd of gazelles on the grassy edge of a jungle'.[120] The greatest criticism of London came from Dr. Herbert Evatt, Curtin's Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs. Elected to parliament in 1940 he had previously been a justice in the Australian High Court from where he had been a vocal supporter of greater federal powers. His public censure of Britain's failure speedily to declare war on Finland, Hungary and Roumania, each of which had sided with Nazi Germany following the latter's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, was but one example. On this occasion though Churchill responded with a stiff rebuke to Canberra, forcing even Curtin to apologise.[121]

It was generally the case however that the reports being received in London about the Australian leader were good, offering a far more optimistic assessment of his character and abilities, and these helped ease any pressure on the DO. In mid-October 1941 Brooke-Popham once again visited Australia to reassure the new government that the British Chiefs of Staff were not neglecting the Far East, subsequently providing a thorough analysis of his visit for the authorities in London.[122] Following the mission to Canada in late 1939, the Air Chief Marshal's next role had been to visit the Union of South Africa to arrange its contribution to the Empire Air Training Scheme. In October 1940 however he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief Far East and it was in this capacity that he made his visit to Canberra. Perhaps key amongst the points raised by Brooke-Popham in his report to the British government was his highlighting the degree to which he had been impressed by the Australian prime minister. Equally encouraged was Duff Cooper when in November 1941 he travelled to Canberra to 'tell the

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[119] See Ross, *John Curtin*, pp.236-239

[120] Whiskard to Eden, 27 February 1940, DO35/1003/3/43; quoted in Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (London: 1988) p.262

[121] Curtin to Cranborne, 4 November 1941, DAFP V, pp.162-163; Churchill to Curtin, 27 November 1941, DO121/119; Curtin to Churchill, 29 November 1941, DAFP V, pp.237-238

[122] Brooke-Popham to Sir Arthur Street, 28 October 1941, Brooke-Popham Papers

Australians how wonderful they are and how almost as wonderful we are'.[123] In a subsequent private letter to Cranborne he recorded that Curtin was 'a modest, sincere, intelligent and honest man and is generally regarded as such'. But with the news, as Waterson put it, that 'the Japs have gone over the top', the expanding war would soon provide a much stiffer test of both the character and the ability of Australia's leadership.[124]

In mid-November 1941 the Australian Chiefs of Staff had presented a report to the Advisory War Council in Canberra which made it clear that the defence of Malaya was impossible in the event of a major attack by Japan.[125] The outcome of this was a strongly worded telegram on the first day of December reminding the British government that during the 1937 Imperial Conference it had promised there would be strong defences at Singapore. Before any response could be made within a week Japanese forces attacked the US Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor along with various other British and American targets in the Pacific and South East Asia.

What was perhaps most surprising about this development was how well received it was by many in London. Churchill's opinions on the matter are well known but a variety of other figures also saw the turn of events as reason for some optimism. One example was the South African High Commissioner who thought there to now be 'a reasonable chance of this year being the last year of the war'.[126] Another was an anonymous member of the DO for whom it was 'the opening of a new chapter'.[127] This commentator also hoped that this change in fortunes would now lead the US to

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[123] Duff Cooper to Cranborne, 31 October 1941, Cranborne Papers; ibid., Duff Cooper to Churchill, 1 December 1941

[124] Diary, 7 December 1941, Waterson Papers

[125] See David Horner, *Defence Supremo: Sir Frederick Shedden and the Making of Australian Defence Policy* (Sydney: 2000) pp.95-96

[126] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, pp.475-477; Ismay to Harry Hopkins, 12 January 1941; Diary, 21 December 1941, Waterson Papers

[127] Anonymous minute, 10 December 1941, DO35/1014/7

> ...realise that it is impossible for it to isolate itself from Europe. On the contrary there is a growing sense of joint responsibility with the British Commonwealth for the maintenance of peace.

A young Nicholas Mansergh, serving in the public relations section of the DO, apparently agreed with the sentiment. With the advantage of hindsight however, he was also able to realise that from this date the war had entered an entirely new phase, one in which 'the importance of exclusively Commonwealth organisations declined'.[128] Indeed following the Japanese attack, Churchill immediately hurried to Washington, against the advice of a number of his War Cabinet colleagues. His intentions however were not merely to co-ordinate the finer details of how the new alliance would function.[129] He was also anxious to ensure guarantees about the 'Hitler first' strategy. More commonly referred to by its short 'ABC-1' title this was originally agreed during the Washington Staff Conversations in early 1941 and focussed the future Allies' effort on the European theatre, as opposed to any Far East conflict, something the British prime minister did not want to see abandoned.[130]

In his absence, the focus of some of those left in London quickly turned to reorganisation of the mechanism for the higher direction of the war. Just a day after fighting had begun in the Pacific, Page sent a long minute to Canberra assessing the many deficiencies that he saw in the existing Anglo-Australian relationship.[131] He also took the opportunity to indicate what he felt needed to be done to rectify them. His intention, he claimed, was to find a method that would 'enable us to exert influence sufficiently early in the formative stage of policy as to modify the war policy itself'. The creation of an Imperial War Cabinet was not the method for doing this, instead it was essential that a special representative should regularly attend London, staying for no more than two or three months. During that time the visitor would be able to refresh the memory of the Australian High Commissioner as to preferred domestic policy and, with full accreditation to attend the War Cabinet, generally put across

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[128] Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, 1939-1952*, p.128

[129] See Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.1-3; Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory*, pp.475-479

[130] Robertson, 'Australia and the 'Beat Hitler First' Strategy', pp.310-311

[131] Page to Curtin, 8 December 1941, DAFP V, pp.289-293

Canberra's views. In short he would 'come for a special job, get it done and get away while he still has punch'.

Page had also developed strong views about the position of Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs which he now shared with Curtin. The holder of this office, he believed, should be one of the most senior members of the Cabinet, 'in close personal touch with the Prime Minister (sic)'. Indeed 'but for his excessive strain and multiplicity of duties in wartime', it was clear to the visiting Australian that Churchill should be the direct link with the Dominions. The clear inference from all of this was, of course, that Cranborne was not able to properly fulfil this role and should therefore be replaced. This despite the fact that in Churchill's absence, the Dominions' Secretary was doing all he could warning members of the War Cabinet that, in light of recent events, 'the Dominions would almost certainly claim to be brought into the picture more fully'.[132]

Before the end of the week, following further criticism of the British handling of the Greek campaign, the British authorities found themselves faced with a request that Page be more fully utilised.[133] The Australian, having heard the news of the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, had meanwhile embarked upon his own efforts, both to strengthen his position and secure reinforcements for the new war theatre.[134] Later reports back to Canberra suggested that Page's conduct during this time had managed only to 'create a deplorable impression' and 'exerted little influence insofar as Pacific Strategy and Australia's needs were concerned'.[135] He did however manage to secure guarantees that troops and planes would be diverted from the Middle East as well as an agreement that he would be given access to all of the facilities Curtin had requested.[136]

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[132] WM132(41), 20 December 1941, CAB65/20

[133] Cranborne to Churchill, 12 December 1941, PREM3/206/1-3; Curtin to Churchill, 13 December 1941, DO121/119

[134] See Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp.319-323; Cumpston, *Lord Bruce of Melbourne*, pp.189-191

[135] Note by Shedden, 17 March 1943 quoted in Day, *The Great Betrayal*, p.219

[136] WM127(41), 12 December 1941, CAB65/20; Memorandum on 'Machinery of Consultation', Page Papers, Item No.642 (1942)

Meanwhile, with mounting press comment in London about Australia's reaction to developing events, there was great disquiet within Whitehall about the tone of the telegrams being received from Canberra.[137] In a report sent to the prime minister in Washington, Attlee advised that recent messages were 'both critical and querulous' and contained 'demands and allegations made not on the basis of ascertained facts but on unspecified information and prior assumptions'.[138] This was happening at a time when the atmosphere in London had become extremely tense with 'the old gang of Chamberlainites...fanning up each other's animosities against the Churchill government'.[139] In this environment Attlee's conclusion was now the same as had been long held by Cranborne, the Labour politician stressing to the prime minister that some form of closer co-operation could no longer sensibly be resisted.[140]

There was another factor to be considered, however, following a further complaint from the Middle East. Lyttelton had been extremely critical of General Blamey's 'weak and ingenuous' conduct during the earlier Tobruk dispute, even going so far as to suggest that the Australian had deliberately set out to cause problems.[141] By December, with Blamey growing ever more impatient with his British colleagues, the situation had considerably worsened. Indeed the government in Canberra was told by its senior military officer in the Middle East that, in his opinion, the Dominions were looked upon 'as appendages of Great Britain [which] had difficulty in recognising the[ir] independent status'.[142] To the British Minister of State in the region he was equally as forthright in repeating such views, leaving Lyttelton increasingly adamant that there was no other option than to replace the 'impossible' Blamey.[143]

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[137] 'Australia is Right', 21 December 1941, *Sunday Express*, Liddell Hart Papers; ibid., 'Blunt Words from Dominions', 23 December 1941, *Daily Mail*

[138] Attlee to Churchill, 23 December 1941, PREM3/63/3

[139] Diary, 19 December 1941 in Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton Diary*, p.337

[140] Attlee to Churchill, 23 December 1941, PREM3/63/3

[141] Lyttelton to Churchill, 18 September 1941, PREM3/63/2; see John Hetherington, *Blamey: Controversial Soldier* (Canberra: 1973) pp.194-195

[142] Quoted in Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, p.63

[143] Lyttelton to Churchill, 22 December 1941, PREM3/63/3

At this point Cranborne remained of the opinion that to approach the Australian government outright with such a request would 'create a first class row'.[144] His advice therefore was to contact Curtin, advise him that Blamey and Auchinleck did not get along and suggest that the former might therefore be better utilised elsewhere. Shortly after Christmas Churchill duly prepared a personal note for his counterpart in Canberra relaying exactly the message suggested by his Secretary of State.[145] But at the last minute it was not sent, the reason for this delay being the British prime minister's desire to first resolve 'other difficulties' with Australia. This delay proved timely as in the interim Curtin asked that Blamey be allowed to return home to take command there.[146] The incident was indicative however of how far the relationship between the two countries had deteriorated and in the weeks to come it was to get worse.

Reorganising the Anglo-Dominion Relationship

Brooke-Popham, one of the many official British visitors to Australia during the latter half of 1941, had warned Whitehall of the growing need to make his hosts 'feel that we in England look upon them as definitely part of one Empire'.[147] It was implied, somewhat prophetically, that were this not to happen there would be a risk of them 'slipping out'. On Boxing Day the Australian prime minister sent a telegram to both Roosevelt and Churchill calling directly for American assistance and indicating that the authorities in Canberra would be happy to accept an American commander in the Pacific. The following day, a special 'New Year' article contributed by Curtin to a leading Melbourne newspaper went further, including within its text the statement that 'Australia looks to America, free of pangs as to our traditional links and kinship with the United Kingdom'.[148]

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[144] Ibid., Attlee to Churchill, 23 December 1941

[145] Ibid., Churchill to Curtin, 27 December 1941

[146] Attlee to Churchill, 28 February 1942, DO121/10B

[147] Brooke-Popham to Sir Arthur Street, 28 October 1941, Brooke-Popham Papers

[148] See Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, pp.324-325; Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: 1988) pp.25-26; Eric Baume, 'Australia's Political Trend', The Fortnightly, Number 151 (January-June 1942), pp.97-106

This was not the first time an Australian leader had referred to the Dominions' right to look elsewhere other than London for foreign policy guidance. One of his predecessors had expressed the view as soon as he had become prime minister that, where the Pacific was concerned, his government needed 'to maintain its own diplomatic contacts with foreign powers'.[149] In both May and June 1940, Menzies had reiterated this view in a series of calls to Roosevelt in which he urged the United States to intervene directly in the Pacific and secure a peaceful resolution with Japan.[150] The DO had been able on that occasion to ensure that these appeals received only scant attention.[151] Curtin's new statement, at a time when Churchill was in Washington meeting with the US president, could not be so easily handled.

Returning to a familiar argument, Cranborne's immediate advice was that if friction was to be avoided, the Dominions would have to be given greater representation in the decision-making process in London.[152] Having instructed Attlee to inform the War Cabinet of how 'deeply shocked' Curtin's 'insulting speech' had left him, Churchill was clearly however not in any mood for compromise. Travelling with the British leader, Sir Ian Jacob was in general agreement with his angry retort. While he noted that his companion had never really understood Far Eastern problems he also felt that 'throughout the war the Australian government [had] taken a narrow, selfish and at times craven view of events in contrast to New Zealand'.[153] Much of the annoyance may well have been generated by Curtin's decision to make his views known publicly. This ensured considerable press coverage in Britain for a subject Whitehall had previously done its best to contain, the ensuing debate leaving little doubt about the deepening divide affecting the Anglo-Dominion coalition.[154] Although Batterbee was

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[149] Menzies Radio Broadcast, 26 April 1939 in R.G.Neale (ed.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937-1949: Volume 2, 1939* (Canberra: 1976)

[150] See P.G.Edwards, 'R.G.Menzies' Appeals to the United States', Australian Outlook, Number 28 (1974), pp.64-70

[151] DO to Whiskard, 21 June 1940, DO35/1003/11/3/7

[152] WM137(41), 29 December 1941, CAB65/20

[153] Quoted in Raymond Callahan, *Worst Disaster: Fall of Singapore* (Delaware: 1977) p.234; Jacob to Ismay, 24 January 1959, Ismay Papers (ISMAYI/14/69a)

[154] 'Mr Curtin Explains', 29 December 1941, *The Times*, Liddell Hart Papers; ibid., 'Dominions and Strategy - a letter to the Editor from Keith Murdoch', 29 December 1941, *The Times*; ibid., 'A Word to Mr Curtin', 30 December 1941, *Daily Mail*

able to reassure the DO that there was unlikely to be panic in New Zealand similar to that which he was hearing about in Australia, the situation was clearly very tense.[155]

Matters were not helped by the arrival of a long-delayed stark message from Cross.[156] The British High Commissioner could only see a war effort suffering from 'the triple handicap of lack of political leadership, a shoddy and irresponsible press and a number of trade union leaders reaping a dirty harvest out of the war'. Having taken a few days to consider these comments, Machtig thought it all 'a desperate picture'.[157] Cranborne was also downcast, hoping that as the report had come by sea and was therefore considerably dated, the Japanese entry into the war might have created a more positive effect.[158] The situation in Canberra clearly left him unhappy, his conclusion being that the government there could do little other than 'squabble, grumble and blame others, in particular us'. And his mood was little improved, as he told Churchill, by the knowledge that people in Britain had been greatly shocked by the recent Australian outburst. Indeed so negative had the public reaction been that the Dominions' Secretary had felt obliged to ask the Ministry of Information to discourage further press speculation wherever possible.[159] Further difficulties faced Cranborne, however, when, on the final day of 1941, Sir Earle Page came to visit him once again.

During the last three weeks, Australia's ministerial representative in London had clearly thought a great deal about his earlier message to Curtin and how to improve Australia's influence. In discussions he had held with Attlee, Bridges and Ismay, he had already been able to secure promises that all FO papers would be made available for him to inspect at the Cabinet offices.[160] Perhaps emboldened by his success, Page now took the opportunity to share, explicitly, some of his revised views about closer Anglo-Dominion collaboration.[161] These centred on the idea of a Dominions minister becoming

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[155] Batterbee to Machtig, 21 December 1941, Batterbee Papers (Box 7/2)

[156] Cross to Cranborne, 3 November, DO35/587/89/137

[157] Ibid., minute by Machtig, 29 December 1941

[158] Ibid., minute by Cranborne, 31 December 1941

[159] Cranborne to Churchill, 1 January 1942, DO35/1002/48/7A

[160] Memorandum on 'Machinery of Consultation', Page Papers, Item Number 642 (1942)

[161] 'Note of a Meeting between Lord Cranborne and Sir Earle Page', 31 December 1941, FO954/4

a member of the Defence Committee and direct representation in the Ministry of Supply. He also thought it imperative that each Dominion should have a man 'of considerable standing' within the FO allowing each to view papers and have the opportunity of indicating their respective countries' attitudes. And, whilst he was sure that his ideas would subsequently be adopted by the other Dominions, in the first instance these improvements should be restricted to Australia alone.

Cranborne was also told in person at this meeting, and not for the first time by a visiting Australian, that a junior minister such as himself was not a suitable person to be the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. Page's considered opinion was that it should instead be somebody who was a member of both the War Cabinet and the Defence Committee. Indeed in future the position would have to be 'regarded as second only to the Prime Minister (sic)'. Although the Dominions' Secretary might easily have taken this as yet another personal attack on his performance, he instead remained affable, seeing 'some force' in his Australian visitor's arguments.[162] He was even prepared to again berate, in writing, his government colleagues, as he had done since October 1940, about the continuing need for closer liaison between Whitehall and the Dominion High Commissioners. Using the latest approach by Page as support, he therefore recommended the appointment of a representative from within the FO, with the rank of under-secretary, to act as a liaison. One of the new appointee's duties would be to keep in close touch with his opposite number at the DO providing a potentially vital service. This would be helpful not just for the Dominions but, as was rather caustically pointed out, it would also aid a department which still did not often 'come into consultation in the earlier stages'.

Whilst this internal debate continued, Cranborne had been correct in his assumption that Page would waste little time in sending his revised proposals to Canberra. In his message he also advised that Bruce, who had closely assisted him, should be made the permanent accredited representative. Although Curtin rejected the latter suggestion, he did adopt the others that were offered, informing the government in London of his desire to now appoint a representative 'with the right to be heard in the War

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[162] 'Lord Cranborne's comments on Sir Earle Page's proposals', 2 January 1942, FO954/4

Cabinet'.[163] With this formal request the Dominions Secretary decided to approach one of his predecessors to discuss a possible overhaul of the existing system.[164] With his writing to Eden, Cranborne's views were revealed to some of the senior members of the FO and their reaction was decidedly unenthusiastic. Having already shown himself to be reluctant to accept any strengthening of the Dominions' role in policy making, Bentinck was once again notable in his comments. The most critical was that he felt Cranborne's proposals would achieve little other than 'please the Dominions'.[165] Forgetting his earlier complaints, he was also now concerned that the FO would be unable to undertake the envisaged role as 'without intimate knowledge of the conditions in various Dominions and the mentality of respective governments we should be likely to make mistakes'.

Although generally dismissive of Page's original plan, another of Bentinck's colleagues was more optimistic about the Dominion Secretary's suggested modifications.[166] This anonymous individual recognised that a clear problem existed for the DO which was a 'channel for the discussion of policy, the finished article', but 'does not take much hand in the processing of the raw material, in the formulation of policy'. As with Cranborne, his solution was to find a method to allow the Dominion leaders to suggest amendments at a much earlier stage, an alteration which he hoped might prove more acceptable to all concerned. All sides seemed to agree though that the issue had now 'assumed big proportions politically' and, hence, would need discussion with Churchill on his return from the United States.

The prime minister, however, was fully occupied at this stage with further Australian complaints. During his Washington discussions he had agreed with Roosevelt's proposal that General Sir Archibald Wavell be appointed Supreme Commander of the ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian) command area, despite some obvious

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[163] 'Memorandum on Machinery of Consultation', Page Papers; Curtin to DO, 1 January 1942, DO35/1002/48/7A

[164] Cranborne to Eden, 7 January 1942, FO954/4

[165] Ibid., Note by Cavendish Bentinck, 12 January 1942

[166] Ibid., minute from unknown to Sir Orme Sargeant, 13 January 1942

indifference amongst certain of his War Cabinet colleagues.[167] This decision had not appeared, however, to especially anger the already sensitive authorities in Canberra until they learned that Wavell's responsibilities had been amended to exclude Australia and Papua New Guinea. This left the Australian leadership angered by what was felt to be the ignoring of its security. And further consternation was caused with news that the naval command of the Australian and New Zealand area of the Pacific, given to the United States Pacific fleet, did not extend as far as the former's eastern coastline.

Another angry exchange of telegrams between Curtin and Churchill therefore followed, the net outcome being an insistence from Curtin that amendments be made to include his country within the new command area.[168] Once more offering his assurance that Australian interests were constantly considered, Churchill would not agree, however, and instead requested a week's pause to consider the scheme in closer detail.[169] Still in regular contact with the visiting British mission, Casey was told by his Minister for External Affairs that this was not the ideal solution. A delay would likely receive a 'very hostile' reaction 'in the event of further and probable setbacks'.[170] Despite this severe view, Australia's representative in Washington nonetheless saw this development as a good opportunity to again press the authorities in London for greater Dominion representation.[171]

The situation in the British capital had however changed and a similar view no longer existed amongst the Dominion High Commissioners.[172] Even Bruce and Waterson were now quite firmly of the opinion that the regular sending of Ministers to attend the War Cabinet was not practicable. Although still fearful of the potential consequences of Churchill 'centralising everything in himself', the latter was especially vehement in his

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[167] WM137(41) & WM138(41), 29 December 1941, CAB65/20; see Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.32-33

[168] Curtin to Churchill, 1 January 1942, DAFP V, pp.396-398; ibid., Churchill to Curtin, 3 January 1942, p.399; ibid., Curtin to Churchill, 6 January 1942, pp.417-420

[169] Ibid., Churchill to Curtin, 8 January 1942, pp.423-426

[170] Ibid., Evatt to Casey, 7 January 1942, pp.420-421

[171] Ibid., Casey to Evatt, 8 January 1942, pp.421-423

[172] WHC, 15 January 1942, DO121/12

advice to Pretoria not to support the idea.[173] Only Page agreed with Casey, his thinking having been broadly the same as that of his colleague in the US during the preceding five months. He was at the same time beginning to achieve some British backing for his plans, his discussions with Ernest Bevin proving 'the most stimulating and satisfactory talk [he] had with any Empire statesman since coming to Britain in the last twenty years'.[174] With the Minister of Labour's suggestion that the FO should absorb the DO making it 'the second office in government', and his offer to support 'a united Empire front', such an assessment was perhaps not surprising.

After his three week absence, Churchill had meanwhile returned to London to more bad news. Whilst in Washington, he had remained confident that the garrison in Singapore would be able to hold off a Japanese attack for as long as two months but the information he received now suggested otherwise.[175] Informing Curtin that, in his opinion, the loss of Malaya had been inevitable in light of the general war situation, such an analysis failed to impress the Australian leader.[176] Faced with a worsening military position and ever greater criticism from Canberra of his wartime conduct, the British prime minister now therefore sought a more conciliatory approach. This involved urging his counterpart not to become 'dismayed or get into recrimination', nor to doubt 'his loyalty to [both] Australia and New Zealand'.[177]

The angry response following reports that it had been agreed to establish a Far Eastern Council in London amply demonstrated the ineffectiveness of Churchill's efforts. The intended role of this new body was to 'focus and formulate views' which would then be passed on to Roosevelt.[178] Canberra had not been informed of this decision until

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[173] Waterson to Smuts, 15 January 1942, Waterson Papers

[174] Diary, 16 January 1942, Page Papers

[175] See Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.45-47

[176] Churchill to Curtin, 14 January 1942, DO121/19; Curtin to Churchill, 17 January 1942, DAFP V, pp.441-443

[177] Churchill to Curtin, 19 January 1942, DO121/119

[178] Churchill to Curtin, 19 January 1942, DAFP V, pp.445-447; Cranborne to Churchill, 17 January 1942, PREM3/167/1

some two days after the authorities in Wellington.[179] It was perhaps not surprising therefore that when official confirmation finally arrived it was critically received, indeed the Australian War Council quickly declared itself to be in unanimous disagreement with the proposal.[180] Canberra instead requested that a Pacific Council be established in Washington.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs was meanwhile facing difficulties in Canberra besides dealing with the government, in the form of his increasingly agitated High Commissioner. In a long and often venomous telegram to London, Cross had launched a serious attack on the Australian leadership. Relations in the past had always been based on 'the assumption that the Commonwealth government shared the spirit of Imperial Partnership', but in recent weeks it had become obvious to the former British minister that this was no longer forthcoming. Indeed his assessment was that there was clear evidence showing 'abuse of the United Kingdom authorities'.[181] To correct the situation Cross therefore urged the DO to assist him in gaining better access to the Australian War Cabinet and to all telegrams passing between the two prime ministers as 'the time [had] come to collect all our weapons and to fight for British prestige'. Greatest alarm was reserved however for his final recommendation, that economic pressure be applied with a British refusal to undertake 'negotiations of a commercial or financial character'.

Cross had admitted to the Dominions Secretary, shortly after his arrival in Australia, that he was 'puzzled' by what he had found. In the intervening period he had endured a difficult time, particularly after the Labour Party had assumed power in Canberra.[182] Much of the reason for this was an ill-advised public statement he made in which he reminded his audience of Russia's communist heritage. In so doing even he would later recognise that he had tied 'a Tory label around [his] neck'.[183] In the prevailing climate,

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[179] Churchill to Fraser, 17 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/124; Cranborne to Churchill, 17 January 1942, PREM3/167/1

[180] Curtin to Churchill, 21 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/128

[181] Cross to Cranborne, 21 January 1942, PREM4/50/7A

[182] Cross to Cranborne, 9 August 1941, Cranborne Papers

[183] Cross to Cranborne, 13 January 1944, DO121/11, Machtig Papers

this was ill-advised, particularly in light of the Governor General's warning to the visiting Duff Cooper in December 1941 that 'if you start wrong in Australia you can never get right again'.[184] Although he was sympathetic to his High Commissioner's situation, at the same time Cranborne acknowledged privately that Cross had 'taken to lecturing Australian Ministers as if they were small and rather dirty boys'.[185]

This attitude was still visible in mid-January in telegrams sent from Cross to London complaining that Curtin had considerably hardened his requests for greater Australian representation.[186] On this occasion the most likely explanation for the Australian government's intransigence was seen as being Evatt's 'anti-Whitehall prejudice', a constant danger during this period. But whatever the provocations had been endured, as far as his confrontational proposals were concerned, the Dominions' Secretary was aghast. So much so that, almost certainly correctly, he warned that to pursue such a line would not bring Australia closer but instead 'give further stimulus to their tendency to look to the United States'.[187] Whilst Smuts reassured Churchill that 'a certain amount of jitters and unreasoning criticism [from] carping critics' was to be expected, it was clear to Cranborne at least that the Anglo-Australian relationship was quickly becoming unmanageable.[188] He therefore resolved to make one final attempt to remedy the situation.

The Final Challenge: 'Inexcusable Betrayal'

Just four days after Churchill had returned to London following his Washington visit, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs submitted two memoranda to the War Cabinet, both of which covered the subject of co-operation with the Dominions.[189] Cranborne had argued with the prime minister since shortly after his appointment back in October 1940 about the need for greater information to be supplied to the Dominion

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[184] Duff Cooper to Cranborne, 1 December 1941, Cranborne Papers

[185] Cranborne to Emrys-Evans, 31 August 1941, Emrys-Evans Papers

[186] Cross to DO, 14 January 1942, DO121/50; Cross to Cranborne, 21 January 1942, PREM4/50/7A

[187] Ibid., Cranborne to Churchill, 22 January 1942

[188] Smuts to Churchill, 20 January 1942, DO35/1009/446/1/52

[189] Memoranda by Cranborne, WP(42)29 & WP(42)30, 21 January 1942, CAB66/21

governments and for them to have a greater role in formulating wartime policy. On every occasion his suggestions had been dismissed. Now, in his first paper, his government colleagues were warned that 'it would...be a great and possibly disastrous mistake...to underestimate the strength of the feeling arising in the Commonwealth [of Australia] on this question'. Making the danger worse in his view, there was also the potential that 'a rot which started in Australia might easily spread to other Dominions'.

This was therefore a genuine crisis, 'an issue not merely of machinery, but even more of status', which could be averted only through wise statesmanship. Cranborne duly recommended, yet again, that if Australia wanted to attend the War Cabinet in London it should be granted this right, 'a gesture that would pay us a hundredfold'. The other Dominions should also be invited to attend although, like Bentinck, he thought that they would probably decline.[190] Representatives would only be allowed to attend however if they held their respective governments' authority to actually make decisions, a point upon which Churchill had been insistent.[191]

Even before they had been presented to the War Cabinet King George VI had read both of the papers prepared by Cranborne. Together with a subsequent note from Hardinge, His Majesty's secretary, to Churchill, warning that the King had been greatly 'alarmed at the feeling which appears to be growing in Australia', this was probably decisive.[192] Up to this point the prime minister had been dismissive of any criticism of his handling of the relationship with the authorities in Canberra. In January 1942, whilst recuperating from a mild stroke in Florida, his mood had been downright belligerent, highly critical of people of 'bad stock'.[193] Just days later he had again rejected the need for greater co-operation, arguing that it would not be possible until such time as the Australians had put to one side 'their Party feud and set up a National Government'.[194]

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[190] Note by Bentinck, 12 January 1942, FO954/4

[191] WM8(42), 17 January 1942, CAB65/25

[192] Alexander Hardinge to Churchill, 22 January 1942, PREM3/167/1

[193] Diary, 9 January 1942 quoted in Lord Moran, *Struggle for Survival* (London: 1966) p.21

[194] WM8(42), 17 January 1942, CAB65/25

In his rapid reply to Hardinge, he now accepted that 'it would be foolish and vain to obstruct [Australian] wishes', offering an assurance that he had in fact already heeded Curtin's requests.[195] This news was welcomed at Buckingham Palace from where it was made quite clear that the King would remain an interested observer of how the situation developed.[196] A more generally sympathetic mood had spread elsewhere in Whitehall with a distinct improvement in attitude apparent even within the previously unenthusiastic FO. Cadogan, in trying to decide how to implement Page's earlier proposals, now felt the prime objective should be 'to give satisfaction to Australia [with] regard to their preference', quite a change from some of his earlier comments.[197] With Eden's agreement, this would lead ultimately to the defunct DID gaining a renewed role.[198]

The only people who seemed less than pleased with the changes following Cranborne's bold move were the Dominion High Commissioners. Massey in particular wanted it stressed that Australia had assumed the driving role and 'that it was for other governments concerned to decide whether they wished to avail themselves of the facilities'.[199] Curtin may still have wanted more but the proposals as they stood could already cause embarrassment for Mackenzie King in Ottawa. With Jordan still refusing to attend meetings with his counterparts because of his 'confirmed inferiority complex', Waterson concurred in his diary that 'it should not be made awkward for Governments not to accept the offer of Cabinet representation'.[200] Privately the Union's London agent was more interested in the proposals. From some of his comments it seems fairly clear that his earlier support for an Imperial War Cabinet had been based upon the calculation that he would attend it on behalf of South Africa. In these Australian suggestions he saw another opportunity for a greater personal role, again observing to Smuts his belief that there was 'no reason why the High

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[195] Churchill to The King, 22 January 1942, PREM3/167/1

[196] Ibid., Hardinge to Churchill, 26 January 1942

[197] Note by Cadogan, 23 January 1942, FO954/4

[198] Newton to DO, 25 November 1942, DO35/1002/52/10

[199] WHC, 26 January 1942, DO121/12

[200] Diary, 22 January 1942, Waterson Papers; ibid., 26 January 1942

Commissioner should not be nominated [as] accredited representative'.[201] The South African leader would however appear to have recognized his High Commissioner's agenda reminding him that, in his opinion, the Dominions policy should solely be to offer Churchill 'wholehearted support in the immense dangers confronting us all'.[202] There was though still very little evidence of anything like this degree of support from Canberra. Far worse was to come as the confrontation between the British and Australian leaderships now quickly reached its climax.

The suggestion that a Far East Council, headed by the British government, be formed in London to oversee the Allied response to the war in the region, remained a considerable source of irritation to the Australian government. New Zealand was also unhappy about this Fraser advising that, although he was 'very sorry to worry' Churchill, his government could not accept any proposal which failed to give them 'direct and continuous' access to the United States.[203] This facility was felt to be essential since, only days before, the government in Wellington had accepted that an American Admiral would be responsible for the conduct of naval operations in the waters surrounding New Zealand.[204] Batterbee, the British High Commissioner, continued to hope that he could secure Fraser's fuller co-operation.[205] In return the DO reassured him that they would do their best to provide more information, following his complaints about the lack of material he was receiving from London.[206] Such efforts were secondary as Cranborne, now directly tasked by his prime minister to find some form of resolution, had decided that an approach should be made to Roosevelt. The US leader was duly informed therefore that Australia and New Zealand both preferred a Pacific Council based in Washington.[207]

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[201] Ibid., Diary, 28 January 1942; Waterson to Smuts, 27 January 1942

[202] Ibid., Smuts to Waterson, 29 January 1942

[203] Fraser to Churchill, 25 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/129

[204] Fraser to Churchill, 22 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/124

[205] Batterbee to Machtig, 22 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/129

[206] Ibid., Machtig to Batterbee, 22 January 1942

[207] Ibid., Peck to Garner, 26 January 1942; Churchill to Roosevelt, 27 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/128

As this was being done in the last week of January 1942, with the military situation in both the Far East and North Africa apparently worsening daily and domestic criticism of his leadership growing, Churchill stood before the House of Commons to make a lengthy statement. Informing parliament that he considered the debate to be a vote of confidence in his leadership, Waterson felt that the prime minister's speech was 'a great performance'.[208] So much so that the South African believed if he were now 'to change his Cabinet a bit', Churchill's position could not be challenged. Providing a detailed analysis of the war situation, during the debate the British leader also took the opportunity to confirm that accredited representatives of any of the four Dominions would have the right to be heard in the War Cabinet.[209] The following day the message was formally repeated to each of the overseas Dominion governments along with the news that they were being invited to send service liaison officers to keep in contact with the Chiefs of Staff organisation.[210] Whilst the government in Canberra was still far from satisfied, after some further discussion it was agreed that with representation secured, they would agree to the London-based council. The calibre of the individual selected to press their claims would be crucial though, and in the first instance it would be the far from convincing Page.[211]

These developments had still done little, however, to reduce the pressure coming from the Australian leadership, where wide discontent apparently remained. At the end of January the British press carried further warnings from Curtin that with 'too many flowery words' from Whitehall, 'patience has limits'.[212] With this renewed use of 'less traditional [diplomatic] methods', it had taken just three weeks for Menzies to be proven wrong in his assurance to the British public that no Australian prime minister

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[208] Diary, 27 January 1942, Waterson Papers

[209] DO to Australia, 28 January 1942, PREM4/43A/14; DO to Australia, 2 February 1942, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/69A)

[210] DO to Dominion governments, 28 January 1942, DO35/1010/476/141

[211] See Garner, *The Commonwealth Office*, pp.213-215; Diary, 9 February 1942 quoted in Dilks, *Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.432; Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp.328-329; Harvey, *Consultation and Co-operation in the Commonwealth*, pp.96-97

[212] 'Curtin is Blunt to Churchill', 27 January 1942, *Daily Mail*, Liddell Hart Papers

would 'stand on any platform and attack Great Britain'.[213] What was not publicly known was a cable sent from Canberra to London a few days before.

This carried the suggestion that the evacuation of Singapore would be seen by the Australian government as 'an inexcusable betrayal'.[214] This explosive charge originated from a secret communication produced by the British prime minister for the three Chiefs of Staff. Mooting the possible abandonment of Singapore, it had inadvertently been shown to Page who had in turn passed it on to Curtin.[215] Churchill's initial response was indignant, warning his Australian counterpart that he would 'make allowances for your anxiety and...not allow such discourtesy to cloud my judgement or lessen my efforts on your behalf'.[216] Although this note was eventually not sent, no doubt as a result of DO intervention, its tone made clear how much anger had been generated. Others in Whitehall were equally upset with the recriminations. The Australian leader, a 'wretched second-rate man...screaming for help', found himself castigated along with his countrymen who had 'suddenly woken up to the cold and hard fact that [Australia's] very existence as a white country depends not on herself but on protection from Great Britain'.[217]

There were, however, those who felt that the level of consultation with the Dominion governments was far from acceptable and it was in fact clear that the groundswell of opinion in favour of changes taking place was considerable.[218] A commentary published in *Round Table* in February 1942 concluded that with the widening war, the Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs should now be a full member of the War Cabinet. *The Times* also carried an editorial endorsing a more significant role for the Dominions in

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[213] See Baume, Australia's Political Trend', The Fortnightly, p.98; R.G.Menzies, 'We Don't Turn From You', *Daily Express*, 6 January 1942, Liddell Hart Papers

[214] Curtin to Churchill, 24 January 1942, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/69)

[215] See Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, pp.48-49; Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p.329

[216] Churchill to Curtin, *Not Sent*, PREM3/150/3

[217] Diary, 24/25 January 1942, Harvey Papers; ibid., 1 February 1942

[218] Diary, 28 January 1942, Woolton Papers

formulating Imperial policy.[219] At the same time somewhat fanciful calls began to again resurface lauding the merits of an Imperial War Conference and demanding that one be called to ensure the rapid agreement of 'improved machinery for consultation'.[220] With Mackenzie King still fearful of any centralisation of power and hence reluctant even to participate in the Pacific War Council, it can only be imagined how these renewed suggestions for a much larger conference were received in Ottawa.[221]

The effective collapse of resistance in Malaya in any case intervened to bring matters to a head. Described by Curtin as 'Australia's Dunkirk', the well-documented defeat inflicted upon the garrison defending Singapore had a chilling effect throughout the Empire on public and political opinion alike.[222] In the days following, Churchill found himself under considerable pressure to implement a serious restructuring of his government and when he again faced an obviously hostile House of Commons he had already bowed to the inevitable.[223] The public announcement which followed revealed a series of changes and although it was claimed these reflected the expanded nature of the war, it was clear that their principal role was to help re-instill faltering confidence in Churchill's ability to lead. Notable amongst them was the resignation of some formerly key figures such as Max Beaverbrook and Arthur Greenwood, the promotion of others including Oliver Lyttelton, and the overall reduction of the War Cabinet from nine to seven members. Also included amongst the promotions was that of the Labour politician Sir Stafford Cripps, who had emerged as a favoured candidate to become Dominions Secretary amongst certain of the High Commissioners in London.[224] Seen by

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[219] 'Commonwealth Control', Round Table, Volume 32 (December 1941-September 1942), p.221; Editorial, *The Times*, 19 January 1942, Liddell Hart Papers

[220] Letter from Hubert Gough to Editor, The New Statesman and Nation (7 February 1942), p.92

[221] Bridges to Churchill, 12 February 1942, PREM3/167/3

[222] 'World View - Anxiety in Australia', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1942, Liddell Hart Papers; Harvey to Eden, 13 February 1942, Harvey Papers; Diary, 16 February 1942 quoted in Pimlott, *The Dalton War Diary*, pp.369-370

[223] Diary, 16 February 1942 quoted in Eden, *The Reckoning*, p.321

[224] Minute, 17 February 1942, Lord Bruce War Files

Churchill as one of his most serious potential threats he instead became Lord Privy Seal and the Leader of the House.[225]

This did not mean that the Dominions' vigorous claims had been ignored, indeed as far as they were concerned there was some especially well received news. Attlee's official appointment as deputy prime minister, a role he had been effectively fulfilling for some time, also saw him named as the new Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs. With Dominion interests now theoretically moved within the War Cabinet, this move was clearly aimed at helping finally silence complaints about their previous exclusion from the policy making process.[226] This decision marked the formal acceptance of everything that had been so passionately argued for by the now former Dominions' Secretary and those senior members of the DO who had supported him throughout the previous sixteen months. As for Cranborne himself, although apparently at one stage considered as the next possible Foreign Secretary, with him again suffering from a bout of ill-health he was instead offered the role of Colonial Secretary which he gratefully accepted.[227] His considerable achievements at the DO, a department into which he had breathed much needed spirit and confidence, would ensure that 'Bobbety' would be long-remembered after his departure. It would however be up to his successor to implement the changes he had sought to implement and help ensure that the Anglo-Dominion relationship prospered in the environment of an expanded global conflict. This unfortunately did not prove to be the case.

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[225] Diary, 23 January 1942, Waterson Papers; Bruce to Curtin, 17 February 1942, DAFP V, pp.530-531; see Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, p.241

[226] Diary, 19 February 1942, Waterson Papers; Comments by prime minister, 'Debate in the House of Commons (War Situation, Ministerial Changes)', 24 February 1942, http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/420224a.html

[227] Machtig to Bridges, 12 February 1942, DO35/1010/476/141; Diary, 19 February 1942 quoted in Dilks, *Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p.435

CONCLUSION

Just five months after his departure from the DO, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, Cranborne was called upon to respond in the House of Lords to a motion that had been put forward by Lord Elibank. This asked that attention be drawn to the maintenance 'of the unity and solidarity of the British Empire'.[1] In the short speech that he made in response, Cranborne took the opportunity to give his opinion about the future of the Anglo-Dominion relationship and where he believed it now stood.

> The successful operation of this [Dominion] conception, of course, puts a great responsibility on the Mother country herself. She has got to recognise that her family are growing up, and that it is always a very difficult thing for any parents to do with regard to any children. They always tend to try and keep their children on leading strings too long. Such a course finally leads to friction and alienation of the child. Indeed the child may - and in a number of cases does - break away entirely from the family, though the passage of time nearly always softens and even wipes away bitterness in later life. We, in Great Britain, have had salutary experiences of this kind. I do not wish to go into those experiences, but they may have been almost worthwhile if they have taught us an essential and invaluable lesson. I think that they have, that we have taken advantage of it, and that it has ever since been our aim to make the links between ourselves and the daughter nations not rigid and intolerable, but as flexible as possible.

Clearly reflecting on the events that had faced him over the last few years, this statement revealed Cranborne's apparent belief that his efforts, and those of the many in the DO who supported him, had made a difference. The evidence however shows that, aside from a brief period of improvement, the overall situation actually stayed much the same. Indeed by late 1941 it was already clear that a hierarchy had emerged in terms of the wartime relationship between the government in London and the respective Dominions.

As Australia was by far the most pronounced in both its support and criticism, it appears to have secured the highest level of contact with officials in London. The Australian High Commissioner in London even went so far as to claim that within the British capital there existed 'a feeling of respect and confidence blended with a little awe - very healthy for the English - as to what Australian reactions will be'. [2] The

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[1] Extract from House of Lords, 21 July 1942 (Col.937-981), DO35/998/7/48

[2] Bruce to Menzies, 18 October 1939, Lord Bruce's War Files

reality however was a considerable difference between the position Australia felt it occupied and the actual situation. Even by February 1940, despite claims from Canberra that the British government regarded Australia 'as the blue-eyed boy amongst the Dominions', the authorities in Whitehall were in fact already critical of its war effort.[3]

At the same time, although Australia had been the first to publicly offer its support to the British government in September 1939, within twelve months its attitude had begun to change. This was for a variety of reasons, not least the volatility that blighted the country's domestic political scene. Robert Menzies' position as prime minister was never strong and once he had visited Britain in early 1941, where he was widely feted, it seems clear that he was interested in the possibility of staying indefinitely. In an attempt to create the correct circumstances to do so however, namely intriguing with the British leader's opponents in London, he also highlighted to his colleagues back home Churchill's often autocratic nature. With his eventual replacement in Canberra by an already naturally suspicious Labour administration, this ensured that the subsequent relationship with Whitehall would face even greater pressures.

The clash between the British and Australian governments following the Japanese attack in December 1941 was perhaps the most serious threat to Anglo-Dominion relations during the entire war. Within a matter of only weeks of the British War Cabinet being reshuffled in early 1942, personal enmity had resurfaced between Churchill and Curtin, the Australian prime minister. Such were the tensions that even *The Times* felt it was a pity 'an impression appears to persist in London that Australian plain speaking is synonymous with empty grumbling and futile fault-finding'.[4] According to Machtig at the DO, Churchill later claimed, in February 1943, that he generally liked Curtin, 'this eminent and striking Australian personality'.[5] This did not prevent him, however, from describing the government in Canberra, shortly afterwards, as 'not representative of Australia and quite capable of using for party purposes at an

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[3] Eden to Whiskard, 4 February 1940, DO35/1003/3/43

[4] Churchill to Curtin, 21 March 1942, PREM3/206/1-3; ibid., Curtin to Churchill, 22 March 1942; 'Australia and the Empire', 24 March 1942, *The Times*, Liddell Hart Papers

[5] Minute by Machtig, 19 February 1943, DO35/1896/213/3

election anything that would be helpful'.[6] Were it not for the fact that Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs in Canberra and previously amongst Churchill's harshest critics, visited London in mid-1942 and was so charmed by the prime minister that he subsequently 'would not hear a word against him', it is debatable just how bitter the relationship might have become.[7] Nonetheless there was obvious suspicion and even hostility with the Canberra government joining their counterparts in Canada in placing greater emphasis on the importance of the United States.

The government in Ottawa, leading the oldest and largest Dominion, maintained a deliberately subdued approach throughout the period in question to its relations with its counterpart in London. Canadian troops were the first to arrive on British shores, as early as mid-December 1939, and the contribution to the war effort they went on to subsequently make could not be criticised. The sizeable French-speaking population in Quebec, however, had no real sympathy with the British Empire. Fully aware of the potential dangers this held, especially were there to be any repeat of the First World War's casualty figures, the country's leader, William Mackenzie King, remained highly suspicious of Whitehall's motives. Backed by advisers who also, in some cases, had serious doubts about Britain's intentions, his fear was that the war would be used as a pretext to challenge the idea of Dominion autonomy. This ensured that, certainly until his visit to London in August 1941, his support was often far from enthusiastic and wherever possible he kept comment to a minimum. Conscious of the growing significance of the United States and, with a strong eye to his future position, the Canadian prime minister was also keen to do everything within his power to foster strong personal relations with President Roosevelt. An in time popular sentiment within the country appeared to adopt a similar view; a Gallup opinion poll conducted in Canada in June 1942 showed that just 52 percent of those questioned definitely wished to remain within the Empire.[8] Although there was some Dominion criticism of 'the habit of prominent Americans...talking as if the British Empire were in the process

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[6] Churchill to Attlee, 4 April 1943, PREM3/63/13

[7] Cross to Cranborne, 13 January 1944, DO121/11; see T.B.Millar, 'The Australia-Britain Relationship', Round Table, Volume 67 (1977), p.195

[8] 'We Remain in Commonwealth after War', 23 June 1942, *Chronicle*, Liddell Hart Papers

of dissolution', as the war drew to a close, it became increasingly obvious that the relationship would, in fact, never be the same again.[9]

The two other belligerent Dominions, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, were, more or less, equally lacking in influence in the hierarchical scheme. In the case of the government in Wellington, with its predominantly British-drawn population, its distance from the European theatre and the relative inexperience it had in foreign affairs, a general acquiescence to the British government was not surprising. The intense dislike of fascism developed by successive governments in Wellington was also significant, helping to further strengthen its strong backing for British policy.[10] Only with Japan's attack on the Far East, bringing the region into the expanding global conflict, did first doubts, and then serious questions begin to emerge. But despite calls made by the prime minister Peter Fraser for a greater direct role for his country in wartime planning, New Zealand's earlier unflinching support helped ensure that its standing in London still remained strong.[11]

In the Union's case, the controversial manner in which Jan Smuts had become prime minister in September 1939 was always likely to place restraints on the degree of active support he could offer, a point always fully understood by the DO.[12] Throughout the war he faced an organised nationalist opposition that, in many cases, openly sympathised with Nazi Germany's objectives; such was the strength of this, it is alleged that Hitler broke out in laughter when he heard the Union had declared war against him.[13] As a consequence of this internal discord, there were frequent riots within the country making it necessary to place restrictive limits on the Union's role in the war similar to those contained within the 1912 Defence Act. This meant that the South African military was obliged to operate on two levels, with only those who wore 'Red Tabs' on their uniforms willing to serve outside of the African theatre of

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[9] Minute by Attlee to Churchill, 16 June 1942, DO121/10B; see Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, pp.66-75

[10] Batterbee to Machtig, 21 December 1941, DO121/116

[11] Cranborne to Churchill, 2 February 1942, PREM3/150/2

[12] 'Empire and the War', November 1939, DO35/99/24/3

[13] See L.H.Gann, 'South Africa and the Third Reich', The International History Review, Volume 14, Number 3, p.518

operations. Even so with disasters such as the surrender of the Second South African Division at Tobruk in June 1942 and continuing nationalist pressures at home, Smuts found himself obliged to maintain a consistently cautious line.

The DO clearly therefore faced considerable challenges throughout the war. There were many complicated and conflicting agendas amongst the Dominion governments to be faced and little interest in them within Whitehall. Tasked with securing the unity of the British Commonwealth of Nations, this meant the department faced a constant and often lonely struggle. The calm resolve it showed, often under extreme pressure, nonetheless proved largely successful. This despite the considerable disadvantage it suffered as a result of its junior nature and small size. And the fact that many of its warnings about the potential that existed for 'confusion' were often misunderstood or ignored. This did not prevent it however from continuing to try and create a better understanding within Whitehall of what the Anglo-Dominion relationship had come to mean in the revised wartime climate from the outset of hostilities.

Although a variety of reasons made it almost certain that the Dominions would choose to support Britain in its second war with Germany in twenty-five years, the doubts that existed in South Africa had been largely overlooked within Whitehall. In helping control the September 1939 crisis, the DO, which did not share its colleagues' overly hopeful assessments, therefore played a pivotal role. It monitored the situation and assisted where it could but it was clear that the situation nearly proved catastrophic for British planning. Indeed moral ties that were said to have played a vital role were in fact only of limited use.[14] And in the highly charged atmosphere, it was the South African prime minister General Hertzog who made the critical mistake by not approaching the Governor-General at an earlier stage in the debate. The British High Commissioner in Cape Town, William Clark, however proved critical in assisting Smuts to overcome calls for the Union of South Africa to remain neutral.

The negotiations for the Air Training Scheme, that followed shortly afterwards in late 1939, represented the first experience for the department of operating in wartime conditions. It responded, for the most part, ably in dealing with what, largely thanks to the Air Ministry's approach, quickly developed into a difficult situation. The DO

[14] Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, p.323

repeatedly tried to warn their Whitehall colleagues about the character of the Canadian leader and the problems they could anticipate trying to negotiate with him. These were largely ignored however and all the department could effectively do was to monitor events, trying to ensure that the situation did not falter too much. Their involvement during the final meetings in London in December 1939 perhaps proved critical in ensuring that the agreement was finally accepted in the face of a good deal of opposition within Whitehall.

Throughout 1940 the department found itself having to respond to the rapidly changing military situation as first Denmark and Norway, then the Low Countries and finally France all fell to German forces. With the considerable changes this carried in terms of how the war was conducted, the Dominions grew increasingly wary about the scarcity of information they believed was being given to them by the British authorities. Despite the department's best efforts and some serious arguments with the British leader, Churchill could not however be persuaded to allow more. The DO nonetheless continued to do everything in its power to remedy the situation as interest from within the Dominions continued to grow.[15]

The most interested Dominion politician in this regard was the Australian leader Robert Menzies who, from the beginning of 1941, began a sustained campaign to secure greater consultation from London. But as the DO quickly discovered this was not his sole agenda for he had set himself upon securing a much greater personal role in the running of Imperial affairs with the ultimate goal of a permanent position in London. From early May 1941 onwards when he had first learnt of the full extent of Menzies' ambitions, the Dominions Secretary had however sought to counter these efforts maintaining a scrupulously supportive stance of his prime minister. These efforts helped ensure that the Australian's efforts were thwarted and with an increasingly untenable domestic position he was ultimately forced to resign from his position in Canberra.[16]

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[15] Minute by Holmes, 13 April 1941, DO35/1012/28/1/1; minute by Machtig, 3 April 1941, DO35/548F/27/55

[16] See Menzies, *Afternoon Light* (London: 1967), pp.14, 52-54; Martin, *Menzies*, pp.373-378

For the DO however this signalled the beginning of a period of much greater pressure as the new Australian prime minister demanded the right to send a minister to sit in the War Cabinet in London. Differences continued throughout the Autumn of 1941 and the Japanese attacks throughout Asia and the Pacific in December only served to exacerbate tensions. The Dominions' Secretary led the campaign in London to secure greater access and improved communication with the full support of his department. And his efforts proved successful when, in February 1942, the British government was reshuffled and the deputy prime minister replaced him, suggesting the possibility of greater access for the Dominions to the highest echelon of power.

The appointment of 'Bobbety' Cranborne as Secretary of State in October 1940 carried with it a significance for Anglo-Dominion relations that cannot be overstated. It was a decisive development as, although it was only his second cabinet position, he brought an enormous sense of determination to the highest level of the Office. As one of those who knew him well concluded, 'frail in body though he was, [he] made up for it by the robustness of his spirit' and he was quick to demonstrate his unwillingness to support measures which he believed might harm the DO.[17] This meant that despite being a longstanding friend of Churchill, he was not afraid to tackle the prime minister directly on the question of providing better information and access for the Dominion governments. This was justified, if by nothing else, by the progressively greater contribution these countries were making both in terms of manpower and material. Cranborne also however believed that greater physical representation was unnecessary, being particularly dismissive of suggestions that a second Imperial War Cabinet should be established. Instead what was needed was for London to tell the Dominion leaders more of what was happening with the war and, whenever he could, he therefore challenged Churchill to be more forthcoming. In February 1942, following the fall of Singapore, his efforts finally proved successful as in the major Whitehall re-organisation that followed, his department received an apparent elevation of status. There was of course a great irony in the February 142 changes and this was that with Cranborne's move to the CO, the Dominions lost their most vocal supporter in British government. When he returned in 1943 the nature of the war had completely changed.

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[17] Ronald Tree, *When the Moon was High* (London: 1975) pp.54-55

The DO had entered the war as the junior department to the CO, but it has been shown that even by 1942 the roles had been reversed. The similar nature of DO and FO functions would indeed seem to have become more accepted as, with the expanded war, the former became a key conduit in the management of important aspects of strategic, economic and even post-war planning. Meanwhile the Office remained firm in its support of the Dominion idea, quick to condemn when reports were 'written from a "superior" standpoint [that] seems to regard the Dominions as strange animals who require special treatment'.[18] During Bobbety's absence it seems clear that the department's ability to keep the Dominions fully informed of events was again challenged, in part as a result of Attlee's appointment as Dominions Secretary. Although the new deputy prime minister lost little time in publicly acknowledging the wartime efforts of Britain's 'free and equal partners', within the DO he revealed himself to have neither the knowledge for his new role nor the interest, instead appearing to those who surrounded him as being 'somewhat aloof'.[19] Despite his membership of the War Cabinet, the only time during the entire war the Dominions would enjoy such access, Attlee also failed to inspire the High Commissioners, so much so that within six weeks of his appointment Bruce claimed to be on the point of resigning.[20] It is perhaps almost ironic therefore that it would be Attlee, now as prime minister, who in October 1948 promulgated the demise of the terms 'Dominion' and 'Dominion governments' to be superseded by 'Commonwealth country' or 'member of the Commonwealth'; 'Dominion Status' was dropped in favour of 'fully independent Member of the Commonwealth'.[21]

To a man the Dominions' representatives were greatly unimpressed with their new circumstances and the expanded War Cabinet that was held, in the High Commissioners eyes, only to have changed from being 'a joke' to 'a farce'.[22] They

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[18] Garner to Costar, 4 February 1944, DO35/1024/75/23

[19] 'Speech at United Warden's luncheon of the City of London', 23 February 1942, Attlee Papers (Bodleian Library, Department of Western Manuscripts) MS.Attlee dep.4, fol.209-220; Dixon Memoirs, Batterbee Papers (Box 20/5)

[20] Diary, 3 March 1942, Waterson Papers; ibid., 28 April 1942

[21] See W.David McIntyre, 'Commonwealth Legacy' in Brown and Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV*, p.696; the department had already been renamed in July 1947 as the 'Commonwealth Relations Office' (CRO)

[22] Ibid., 5 June 1942; ibid., 25 June 1942

were though perhaps naive to expect more for, as at least one London journal had pointed out, the change to the system in fact offered little that was new.[23] Ultimately it would remain the case that 'the Commonwealth would [continue to] be ruled by Britain alone, just as Britain is ruled by Mr. Churchill'. This continuation, it was argued, was the result of a 'species of arrogant negligence' for which the British prime minister was directly responsible. And without Cranborne to oppose him, Churchill was indeed free to again dictate the flow of information and ensure that there would be no 'pumping [of] pessimism throughout the Empire'.[24]

Although a staunchly self-professed imperialist, the prime minister's views continued to draw their basis from an era that was quickly drawing to a close. With his highly romanticised, but often conditional view of the Empire, he found it hard to view the Dominions as equals. Indeed to certain commentators in London, the British prime minister was 'Eighteenth century in many respects' and even his undoubtedly closest Dominion confidante, Smuts, could only lament the degree to which Churchill remained 'obsessed with 1776'.[25] Explaining the character of his friend to Bruce and Waterson, the High Commissioners who had battled with him the hardest, for the great South African statesman Churchill was 'an actor, an artist...playing his part and [whom] no one can stop him'.[26] For a time, however, the DO had managed to do just that, thanks largely to the unfailing energy of the department's personnel and the determination of its Secretary of State. During a period when very few dared challenge 'the rogue elephant', this must surely stand as a lasting testimony.[27]

But perhaps the best comment about the DO's role during the first years of the Second World War must surely be that made by Gerald Campbell. Until 1940 Britain's High Commissioner in Ottawa, but not originally from the department, he had gone to Canada with little knowledge of it other than the generally negative Whitehall view. Upon his subsequent departure for Washington, he could only conclude that 'other UK

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[23] 'Imperial War Cabinet', The New Statesman and Nation (14 & 21 February 1942)

[24] Churchill to Attlee, 4 March 1942, Chartwell Papers (CHAR20/67)

[25] Diary, 12 & 19 October 1942, Massey Papers

[26] Diary, 3 November 1942, Waterson Papers

[27] General Ismay to Brooke-Popham, 15 June 1941, Ismay Papers (Ismay V/1/13)

departments...would have produced secession any day of the week if what was once described to me as the "bloody Post Office" had not done a most useful job'.[28] And whilst the general view appears to remain a blissful ignorance of its activities or even existence, it is undoubtedly the case that this was a department that played a major, if not largely recognised, role in the successful wartime management of the British Empire.

[28] Campbell to Batterbee, 20 May 1940, Batterbee Papers (Box 6/2)

Appendix One

The Amery Report: 'The Dominions and Colonial Offices – Proposals for Re-organisation' (1925)

The Dominions and the Colonial Office

Proposals for Reorganisation

(Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies)

An essential condition of Imperial unity to-day is the full recognition of the demand of the Dominions to be treated as equal in status - if not in stature - with ourselves as partner nations in the British Empire. Any failure, or even undue delay, in meeting that demand on lines that preserve Imperial unity tends to create a demand for the assertion of that status in the direction of a position increasingly approximating to that of foreign nations. On the other hand any action on our part which gives evidence of a spontaneous recognition of Dominion status, even in small matters, has what to us may seem a quite surprising effect on Dominion sentiment.

Few things, in this connexion, create more latent resentment in the Dominions than their "subordination" to the Colonial Office. They can never quite forget that their present position was won step by step against the assertion of Colonial Office authority, and, absurd though it may seem to us, are always suspecting the Colonial Office of endeavouring to reassert its old power by some devious scheme to the detriment of their hard won autonomy. Mr. Mackenzie King's speeches and actions continually reveal that attitude. Apart from this purely

historical "complex" about the Colonial Office they keenly resent the name as a badge of subordination, and dislike the idea that the same officials should deal indiscriminately with their affairs and those of the coloured races in the dependencies directly under Colonial Office control.

The issue was raised by Mr. Deakin at the Conference of 1907, when he urged that Dominion affairs should not be "jostled in a Department overburdened with administrative work alike and yet different in character". It was raised again in 1911 by a specific resolution from New Zealand, endorsed by South Africa, urging "that it is essential that the Department of the Dominions be separated from that of the Crown Colonies and that each Department be placed under a separate Permanent Under Secretary". All the long discussions on constitutional relations during those two conferences were, in fact, really based on the one desire of getting away from the Colonial Office. The practical objections which disposed of the particular proposals for assigning all the Dominions work to the Prime Minister, or for creating a Joint Empire Secretariat, did not dispose of the dissatisfaction which underlay those proposals. In 1917 and 1918 the underlying grievance was again ventilated in connexion with the question of "channels of communication". If the matter has not been more vigorously pressed of late it is, I believe, not because the position is less resented, as because the Dominions feel that it is hardly consistent with the principles

on which inter-Imperial relations are based t go beyond a certain point in expressing their views as to the internal administrative organisation of another part of the Empire.

Meanwhile practically nothing has been done to satisfy Dominion sentiment in this matter. The Colonial Conference was rechristened Imperial Conference in 1907, and of late years a certain number of the more important telegrams to and from the Dominions are headed as being from Prime Minister to Prime Minister. In 1907 also the work inside the Colonial Office was divided to the extent of establishing a separate Dominions Department under its own Assistant Under Secretary. The Dominions work is no longer done by the same subordinates who deal with the Colonies and Protectorates. But both sides of the work are still dealt with indiscriminately by the Permanent Under Secretary, the Parliamentary Under Secretary and the Secretary of State. And if there is, in fact, very little substance in the idea that the attitude of these functionaries in dealing with the Dominions is unconsciously influenced by habits of mind acquired in giving orders to their Colonial subordinates, there is a real and much more serious danger of Dominion problems not getting the thought and attention they deserve from the men at the head of the office compared with the more immediately urgent mass of administrative detail on the Colonial side with which they are continually overwhelmed.

This brings me to the practical considerations which reinforce the sentimental demand of the Dominions for the division of the Colonial Office. The work of that office has

increased beyond all measure in recent years. On the Colonial side the work in connexion with the economic development of our African territories has more than doubled. The general standard, indeed, of what is expected of our Colonial administration not only in regard to trade, but in regard to health, to education to the active promotion of native agriculture, to transportation, has risen enormously. It is rightly rising all the time, and all the time demanding more attention and consideration at headquarters. To allthis has been added a very considerable additional section of work in the administration of Palestine and Iraq.

On the Dominion side the liaison work of keeping the Dominion Governments posted on the progress offoreign and imperial affairs, on matters arising out of the League of Nations, the discussions of the Committee of Imperial Defence etc. has grown enormously and is growing in volume and importance all the time. The Foreign Affairs aspect of the work, indeed, is one where the slightest lack of attention or delay, due to the pressure of other work on the hands of the office, may easily lead to the gravest embarrassments in the conduct both of Imperial and of foreign policy. A new Dominion, the Irish Free State, with problems all its own has been added to the work of the Dominions Department in the last two years. Lastly a whole additional department, requiring not only a considerable permanent staff, but the constant supervision and intervention of a Ministerial head capable of carrying on negotiations with the Dominions, has come into being in connexion with Empire Settlement. The development of that most important work, which in most of the Dominions is

in charge of a substantive Minister, has suffered seriously owing to the fact that it has never had more than the merest fraction of the time of an overworked junior minister, usually not even connected with the department to which the Overseas Settlement Office belongs. // I have no hesitation in saying that one Secretary of State with one Parliamentary Under Secretary and one Permanent Under Secretary are quite incapable, under present conditions, of coping adequately with the two great fields of work which are at present lumped together in the Colonial Office.

There is an additional reason for increasing the staff for dealing with the work now done by the Colonial Office. That is the necessity for keeping the office in direct personal touch both with the Dominions and also with the work in the Colonies and Protectorates. It is most desirable that the Secretary of State should visit at least one of the Dominions every year: the assumption that all the travelling should be done by the Dominion Ministers when consultation is required is just one of those things which offend their sense of what is implied in equal partnership. It is no less important that some Minister should frequently see for himself the work in the Colonies. All this obviously is impossible under present conditions.

A reorganisation which will strengthen the office at the top is urgently needed on practical grounds of the efficient conduct of the work; quite apart from the considerations of Dominion sentiment which call for a clearer separation of their affairs from the control of the "Colonial" Office. On the other hand there are considerable

practical objections to the creation, under present conditions, I say not, of an entirely separate Dominions Office with a separate Secretary of State in a separate building; or to the combining of such a separate office with some other office, such as that of Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary or President of the Council. There are many kindred questions which will always, I think, make it desirable that the Dominions and Colonial Offices should keep in close contact. The existing Colonial Office Library and Legal Department are of equal service to both and could not be divided without unnecessary inconvenience or expense. The present building can, though not without great difficulty, house the essential staff.

The proposal which I, therefore, submit to the Cabinet is that while the Dominion view should be fully accepted by the creation of a separate Secretaryship of State for Dominion Affairs and of a Dominions Office, the practical aspect of the case should be met by continuing to vest the new Secretaryship in the same person as the Colonial Secretaryship and by retaining the Dominions Office for internal administrative purposes as a part of the Colonial Office.

The actual changes involved would only be two: The first would be the appointment of an additional Parliamentary Under Secretary of State to deal with Dominion Affairs and to act as Chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee. I regard this addition as urgently required in any case. The present Parliamentary Under Secretary does not attempt, overloaded as he already is with Colonial questions, to touch these matters, and it is quite

impossible for me to attempt to give effective direct supervision to the important work of Empire Settlement. The additional Under Secretary would naturally be in the House of Lords, and this would get over the present unsatisfactory arrangement by which a junior minister in an entirely different office has to try and keep in touch with Dominion and Colonial Affairs.

The second change would be the appointment of an additional Permanent Under Secretary, so as to enable each side of the work to be directly in charge of a man of first class ability and of the right temperament. It is necessary to remember that the Dominion and Colonial work are essentially different in character, as different as the work of the Foreign Office from that of the Admiralty. The Dominions work is entirely political and diplomatic. The Colonial work is administrative and directive. The one calls for great insight and infinite tact. The other for initiative and drive. Even if the volume of work were not, as it is, far too much for one man, it would be practically impossible to find the man who would be equally good in both capacities. Moreover wherever administrative and policy work are thrust upon the same person, the thinking ahead of policy always tends to get neglected and thrust aside for the mentally easier and more urgent administrative decisions. It is this fact which really underlies the profound objection of the Dominions to the idea that any official who deals with Colonial affairs should deal with them.

Appendix Two

The Scott Report
(1925)

To

The Right Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P.,

Prime Minister.

Sir,

We were appointed by Treasury Minute of the 22nd January 1925, in which you stated that on the recommendation of the Secretary of State for the Colonies you proposed to set up a Committee to enquire into the higher establishment of the Colonial Office with the following terms of reference:-

> "To enquire into, and report on, the best form of organisation for giving effect to the policy of creating a Secretaryship of State for Dominion Relations, separate from (but vested in the same person as holds) the office of Secretary of State for the Colonies",

2. It is understood that the object of this policy is to make a further advance towards satisfying Dominion feeling that, so far as possible, Dominion and Crown Colony problems should be considered through different channels and by different persons. We have accordingly kept this consideration before us in reviewing the higher establishment of the Colonial Office, and in making our recommendations.

3. We have had the advantage of discussing the matters arising out of our terms of reference with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Parliamentary Under Secretary, the Acting Permanent Under Secretary, three of the four Assistant Under Secretaries, and the Vice Chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee. We have also had before us the records of the discussions on the organisation of the Colonial Office which have taken place from time to time in Imperial Conferences,

4. A proposal that the affairs of the Dominions should be administered by a separate Department of the Colonial Office was discussed at the Imperial Conference of 1907. Lord Elgin then undertook so to separate the Departments of the office as to have a distinct division dealing with the affairs of the Colonies with responsible Governments. At the same time he pointed out that there must be at the head a connecting link between the several parts of any office. In the result, the Dominions Department of the Colonial Office as now constituted came into existence.

5. The question of Colonial Office organisation was again brought up at the Imperial Conference in 1911, when the Government of New Zealand moved the following resolution: "that it is essential that the Department of the Dominions "~~should~~ be separated from that of the Crown Colonies and that "each Department ~~should~~ be placed under a separate Permanent "Under Secretary". The Secretary of State (Mr. Harcourt), after describing the organisation of the office which resulted from the Conference of 1907, stated that he would be prepared to accept the proposal to appoint a second Permanent Under Secretary to deal with Dominion affairs if it were strongly pressed by the Conference, but he proceeded to set out what in his opinion would be the disadvantages which would accrue from such an arrangement, internally to the office and externally to the Dominions. He emphasised the difficulty of conducting an office with two co-equal permanent heads, the disadvantage of the political head, who is liable to change at any moment, being the only person with comprehensive experience of Dominion and Crown Colony business, and of the Permanent Under Secretary for the Dominions being wholly divorced from

knowledge

knowledge of the proceedings in Crown Colonies, Protectorates, and other places contiguous to the Dominions. The Conference appears to have deferred readily to the view of the Secretary of State, and the matter was not pressed. The question of the actual organisation of the Colonial Office does not appear to have been raised at any subsequent Imperial Conference. The records of such later discussions as have taken place show that, while Dominion Prime Ministers have evinced great concern as to their relations with the Imperial Government, and in particular with the British Prime Minister, they have made no suggestion that the internal organisation of the Colonial Office is in need of change.

6. The higher establishment of the Colonial Office below the Secretary of State consists of the following officers :-

1 Parliamentary Under Secretary

1 Permanent Under Secretary

4 Assistant Under Secretaries of State, allocated as under -

1 to Dominions Department

1 to Middle East Department

and 2 to Crown Colonies and Protectorates.

One of the last named officers is in charge of the General Department to which are assigned certain subjects affecting all Departments of the Office, e.g. establishments, pensions, patronage and promotions, honours, postal, copyright, telegraph and commercial treaties and conventions, together with a number of other subjects requiring centralised treatment.

7. In order to complete the picture, reference must be made to the Overseas Settlement Department, which, though deriving its authority from the Secretary of State and

transacting

transacting its business in his name, acts, in its executive capacity, to a large extent independently of the Colonial Office. This Department is assisted in its work by an advisory Committee, containing both official and non-official elements. The Secretary of State is the President of the Committee: the Chairman is another Minister: The Vice Chairman is the permanent official in charge of the Office. It is understood that this officer consults at his discretion the Ministers and officials of the Colonial Office on any questions of policy that may arise in the course of his work affecting the relations between the Dominion and Home Governments. It will be appreciated that the bulk of the work of the Overseas Settlement Department is concerned with emigration to the Dominions. It is only concerned to a small extent with the Crown Colonies and as regards foreign countries its practice is rather to discourage than to foster emigration.

8. Thus at the present time the administrative work concerning the Dominions is dealt with by a separate Department of the Colonial Office in charge of an Assistant Under Secretary. The only other business of this Department, and of the officer in charge of it, is to deal with the affairs of the Colonies, Protectorates etc. immediately contiguous to the Union of South Africa and the Commonwealth of Australia.

9. It will be noted that the separation of the administrative work connected with Dominions and Colonies respectively reaches as far as the Permanent Under Secretary. As regards subject matter, the only further step that could be taken would be to allocate to the Crown Colonies side of the Office the territories contiguous to the Union of South Afrion and the Commonwealth of Australia now dealt with by the

the Dominions Department. This arrangement has been made solely on the grounds of administrative convenience, and with the particular object of securing the full recognition of Dominion interests in decisions of policy affecting these territories. It would therefore appear of doubtful expediency to disturb present arrangements.

Further reference will be made later to the case of these territories in connection with the functions of the Permanent Under Secretary.

10. As regards personnel, the only further separation that could be effected would be by having two Secretaries of State, two Parliamentary Under Secretaries, and two Permanent Under Secretaries. Our terms of reference imply the creation of separate Secretaryships of State for Dominion Relations and for the Colonies respectively, the two offices continuing to be held by the same person. In these circumstances the primary question to which we have addressed ourselves is whether or not it is desirable to appoint one or more additional Under Secretaries.

11. But before discussing in detail the higher organisation of the office, we wish to call attention to a consideration affecting the whole work of the Department viz. the substantial growth in the volume and importance of the work during the last ten years. We are clear that this has inevitably added greatly to the burdens of

Ministers

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s also been assumed that there is no question of separating certain n services, such as the Legal Department, the Registry, the Library

derable additions have been made to the administrative staff to cope the increased work. Including the Middle East Department and the nes Settlement Department there are now four Assistant Under Secre- s and fifteen Assistant Secretaries as compared with two Assistant Secretaries and eight of a rank equivalent to an Assistant Secretary the war. The lower administrative staff has been very substantially gthened.

Ministers and of the Permanent Under Secretary.

12. The Irish Free State is now a self-governing Dominion and Southern Rhodesia a self-governing Colony. Great Britain has been entrusted with the mandates for the Tunganyika Territory and for spheres of the Cameroons and Togoland. Northern Rhodesia has also come under the direct control of the Office. The mandate for Nauru is administered jointly by Great Britain, the Commonwealth of Australia, and the Dominion of New Zealand. In 1921 the Middle East Department was added to the Office to deal with the mandated territories of Palestine and Iraq. That Department is also concerned with Aden and with questions of Arab policy.

13. In addition to this accession of territory, other factors have tended to swell the volume of work, such as the growing complexity of the business dealt with, the increasing attention paid to Imperial affairs and to the economic development of the overseas possessions, and the need in many Dependencies for over-taking arrears due to the war, or as in Tanganyika, for repairing war damage.

14. Again, while the growth of elective or partly elective Assemblies in the Crown Colonies results in some dealing in the volume of routine business to be transacted in the Office, it also gives rise to fresh political problems and tends on balance to increase the number of questions with which the higher authorities of the Department have to deal.

<u>Parliamentary Under Secretary.</u>

15. No formal allocation of any one type or class of work to the Parliamentary Under Secretary has, we understand, been made. Obviously the work of this Minister

for

for the time being must depend in large measure upon the respective interests and circumstances of the Secretary of State and himself. But it is probably true to say that the tendency has been for the Parliamentary Under Secretary to devote his time more and more exclusively to the affairs of the Crown Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandated Territories. Thus he has been left little time in which to assist the Secretary of State in dealing with work arising out of the Dominions Department. We gather that of late years the Secretary of State has usually dealt with the work of that Department without the intervention of the Parliamentary Under Secretary.

16. Another consequence of the absorption of the Parliamentary Under Secretary in Colonial affairs is seen in the arrangement until recently in force by which a Minister belonging to some other Department has taken the Chair at meetings of the Overseas Settlement Committee. These duties were performed in 1921 and 1922 by the present Secretary of State when holding the office of Financial Secretary to the Admiralty. For a few months after October 1922, the Chair was taken by the Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Colonies, and afterwards by successive Parliamentary Secretaries to the Department of Overseas Trade, until the present Government came into office. We understand that the Secretary of State himself has been taking the Chair since November last pending the conclusion of other arrangements. There is no reason to doubt that the natural and proper arrangement would be for the Chairmanship of this Committee to be held by a Parliamentary Under Secretary of the Colonial Office. Presumably the Dominions would share this opinion.

17. Our investigations point to the conclusion that the practical divorce of the Parliamentary Under Secretary from Dominion affairs, and his inability to act as Chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee, are due mainly to the great volume of work which necessarily falls to him on the Colonial side. The increase in recent years in the number of territories to be administered, and the political and economic development of many of the old established Colonies, appear to make it imperative that under present conditions Colonial affairs should have, so far as possible, the undivided attention of one Minister.

18. It is equally desirable that a Parliamentary Under Secretary should be available to act as Chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee and to keep in closer touch with the work of that Department than has been possible in recent times. It would also, no doubt, be an advantage to the Secretary of State, both in Parliament and in the Department, if the same Parliamentary Secretary were able to assist him in the consideration of Dominion questions.

19. In view of the above considerations we are of opinion that an additional post of Parliamentary Under Secretary would be justified by reference solely to the volume and character of the work. We assume also that such an appointment would be welcomed by the Dominions when its purpose and scope were explained.

20. Although, as will be seen, we contemplate that one Parliamentary Secretary would be dealing primarily with Dominion, and the other primarily with Colonial affairs, we do

do not assume that the division of duties would be in any sense rigid, since occasions must occur in Parliament and elsewhere when one would be acting for the other.

21. The appointment of a second Parliamentary Secretary would also make it easier to arrange visits of Colonial Office Ministers to different parts of the Empire. It is true that, so far as a Minister was absent from the Colonial Office, he would not provide the relief which appears desirable. But this objection is largely met by the practice of confining these visits to periods when Parliament is not sitting.

22. It has also been represented to us in evidence that if it were decided to have two Parliamentary Secretaries, it would no doubt be of advantage if, when the Secretary of State is in the House of Commons, one of them was a member of the House of Lords. This body contains a large number of persons versed in Imperial affairs, many of whom have had actual administrative experience in various parts of the Empire. It has been suggested that for this reason alone, it is inconvenient for the debates in that House to be taken on behalf of the Government by Ministers of Departments other than the Colonial Office.

Permanent Under Secretary.

23. It is understood that until 1921 it was the practice for the Permanent Under Secretary to advise on all questions requiring Ministerial decision. This practice, we are informed, was afterwards modified and papers were in certain cases minuted by Assistant Under Secretaries direct to Ministers. This was especially the case in regard to the

Crown

Crown Colony and Middle East work. To-day the Acting Permanent Under Secretary is again advising on practically all Ministerial papers.

24. The position is therefore that, at the moment, the Permanent Under Secretary is receiving papers from four Assistant Under Secretaries and advising two Ministers thereon. We doubt whether, as a permanent arrangement, one Permanent Under Secretary could be expected, under modern conditions, to deal effectively in the broadest sense with questions of policy coming from four sources, without any barrier or assistance between himself and them, whilst at the same time remaining available for frequent consultations with Ministers and interviews with Dominion and Colonial administrators, and reserving leisure to take the initiative in cases where methods of business, or the treatment of particular subjects, as watched from his pivotal position, seem to require further correlation or improvement.

25. We have therefore reached the conclusion that, in existing circumstances, quite apart from the desirability of meeting Dominion sentiment, some change in the higher organisation of the office is required in order to relieve the Permanent Under Secretary.

26. The first possibility is that there should be two Permanent Under Secretaries of equal status and salary, each in charge of an entirely separate Department. One Under Secretary and Department would deal exclusively with Dominion and the other with Colonial affairs. The arguments

in

in favour of this plan may be put in this way. The work of the Office falls naturally into these two divisions and therefore there should be no difficulty in making a clean cut. Moreover Dominion business is different in kind from Crown Colony business, the former being largely diplomatic and the latter mainly administrative. Thus, while the two Departments would have some points of contact, there could be no insuperable obstacle to complete severance. The Permanent Under Secretary for the Dominions Department would be able to give his undivided attention to Dominion matters, and the self-governing parts of the Empire would be finally satisfied that their affairs were no longer being handled at any stage by officials who were dealing concurrently with the entirely different problems of the Dependencies.

27. We have given most careful consideration to this plan, but we are unable to recommend its adoption.

28. In the first place, while the distinction between Dominion and Crown Colony work is well-founded so far as it goes, it can easily be over-emphasised. The points of contact and the cases of overlapping are both numerous and important. For example, to refer again in more detail to the territories mentioned in paragraph 9, the problems arising in the three Protectorates which geographically form enclaves in the Union of South Africa, and in the Pacific Islands which form a group of Dependencies adjacent to the Commonwealth of Australia, cannot, we assume, be considered without the utmost regard being paid to the views and susceptibilities of those two Dominions.

29. Or again, take the question of a naval base at Singapore. Here both the Pacific Dominions and the Far

Eastern

Eastern Possessions are vitally interested. The question is also bound up with the general subject of the defence of the Empire as a whole. Further, apart from the matters which, as we have already mentioned, it has been found necessary to assign to the General Department, there are a number of highly important and controversial subjects which affect practically the whole Empire, such as the treatment of native races and economic policy (e.g. Preference). However closely touch is maintained in the earlier stages of the work, all these matters must require the most careful co-ordination in their final stages, and we consider it essential that, when Ministers come to consider questions affecting both Dominions and Crown Colonies, they should have available the judgment and experience of the Permanent Adviser whose writ runs over the whole office and who is thus able to deal authoritatively with such problems in their two-fold aspect.

30. In the second place, there is the question of office management. We have assumed that no attempt would in any case be made to divide common services, such as Legal Assistants, Registry, etc., or to alter the arrangements whereby the higher division staff is recruited for the office as a whole, and is regarded as interchangeable between different parts of the office. If this is so it follows that one of the Permanent Under Secretaries would definitely have to be in charge of office arrangements. This would obviously present difficulties. No doubt, given complete accord between the two Permanent Under Secretaries, the arrangement might work, but absence of friction cannot be regarded as inevitable, especially as many opportunities

for

for difference of opinion must arise e.g. as to allocation of staff. We have no hesitation in saying that if the two Permanent Under Secretaries were unable to agree on office matters, the efficiency of the Department could not fail to be seriously impaired. If, as may be assumed, the Dominions Under Secretary was regarded as senior to his colleague, this difficulty would be emphasised, by the fact that the Dominions Staff would form only a small part of the whole.

31. We cannot therefore recommend doubling the post of Permanent Under Secretary of State. From the point of view both of co-ordination and of office management, we consider it essential that the responsibilities of the Permanent Under Secretary should remain in the hands of one person.

32. But we think that it is possible to devise a method of relieving the Permanent Under Secretary from what appears to us to be his present over-burdened position without in any way derogating from his ultimate reponsibility for the whole office. Our recommendation is that there should be a Deputy Under Secretary of State, ranking below the Permanent Under Secretary and above the Assistant Under Secretaries. This would be an additional post on the basis of the existing organisation. It is true that the authorised establishment of the office already provides for an officer of the rank and pay of Deputy Under Secretary, but in fact the officer who held the post until recently did not normally act as Deputy, but as one of the line of Assistant Under Secretaries. On the transfer of this officer to other duties the post of Deputy war left unfilled, but a promotion was made to the rank of Assistant Under Secretary.

33. We have no intention of attempting to lay down the precise

precise manner in which the respective work of the Permanent Under Secretary and his Deputy should be arranged. That must remain essentially a matter for mutual arrangement and consultation, but certain possible lines of approach emerged from our enquiries. The Permanent Under Secretary would no doubt continue to be mainly occupied with the large questions of policy arising on the Dominion side, and it would appear that his Deputy could afford him the greatest measure of relief by taking off his hands the bulk of the questions which arise out of the Crown Colony work. We suggest that the Deputy Under Secretary should be able finally to settle or to send forward to the Parliamentary Under Secretary on the Colonial side the bulk of these cases. He would send forward to the Permanent Under Secretary, or consult him in regard to, such questions alone as involved issues of the highest importance from the point of view of Colonial administration, or had reactions upon Dominion policy. Such an arrangement would not of course preclude Ministers from consulting the Permanent Under Secretary on any question which had not come to them through him. The result of these arrangements should be that, whilst the Permanent Under Secretary could by consultation and the receipt of information keep in touch with purely Colonial questions, and could himself deal with the most important of them on their way to Ministers, he would be relieved of the bulk of Crown Colony work and freed for the more effective consideration of Dominion problems.

34. We venture to think that, so far as the Dominions take an interest in the internal organisation of the Colonial Office, they are much more concerned with the distribution Ministerial functions than with the arrangement of the work

between

between permanent officials. If this is so, the appointment of an additional Parliamentary Under Secretary, primarily in connection with Dominion affairs, would appear in their eyes a more important event than anything which might happen to the Permanent Under Secretaryship. But we assume that it would be not unpleasing to the Dominions to feel that in future the Permanent Under Secretary would have more leisure to devote to the problems in which they are interested, owing to the appointment of a Deputy to take off his hands the bulk of the Crown Colony work.

The Assistant Under Secretaries and Lower Administrative Staff.

35. If our recommendations for the appointment of an additional Parliamentary Under Secretary and a Deputy Under Secretary were adopted and it were found possible to allocate the work between the Permanent Under Secretary and the Deputy as suggested above, it is assumed that in future the Assistant Under Secretaries dealing with the Crown Colonies and the Middle East would submit their cases to the Deputy Under Secretary, and that the Assistant Under Secretary in charge of the Dominions Department would continue to consult the Permanent Under Secretary direct. Our enquiries did not proceed sufficiently far to enable us to express an opinion upon the number of Assistant Under Secretaries that would be appropriate to the new arrangements recommended. Still less are we in a position to offer any observations on the number or functions of the Assistant Secretaries. But after experience has been gained of the new organisation of the highest posts in the office, whatever form that reorganisation may take, we venture to suggest that it would be desirable to direct an enquiry into the

administrative

administrative establishment as a whole, in order to see whether any alteration of numbers, or changes in scope of duties, or in methods of work, or arrangements of the business of the office are desirable in the interests of efficient and economical administration.

We are, Sir

Your obedient Servants,

R.R. SCOTT.

H.P. HAMILTON.

R.V. NIND HOPKINS.

20th February, 1925.

Appendix Three

The Dominions Office –
Floor-Plan and Staff
(circa. 1940)

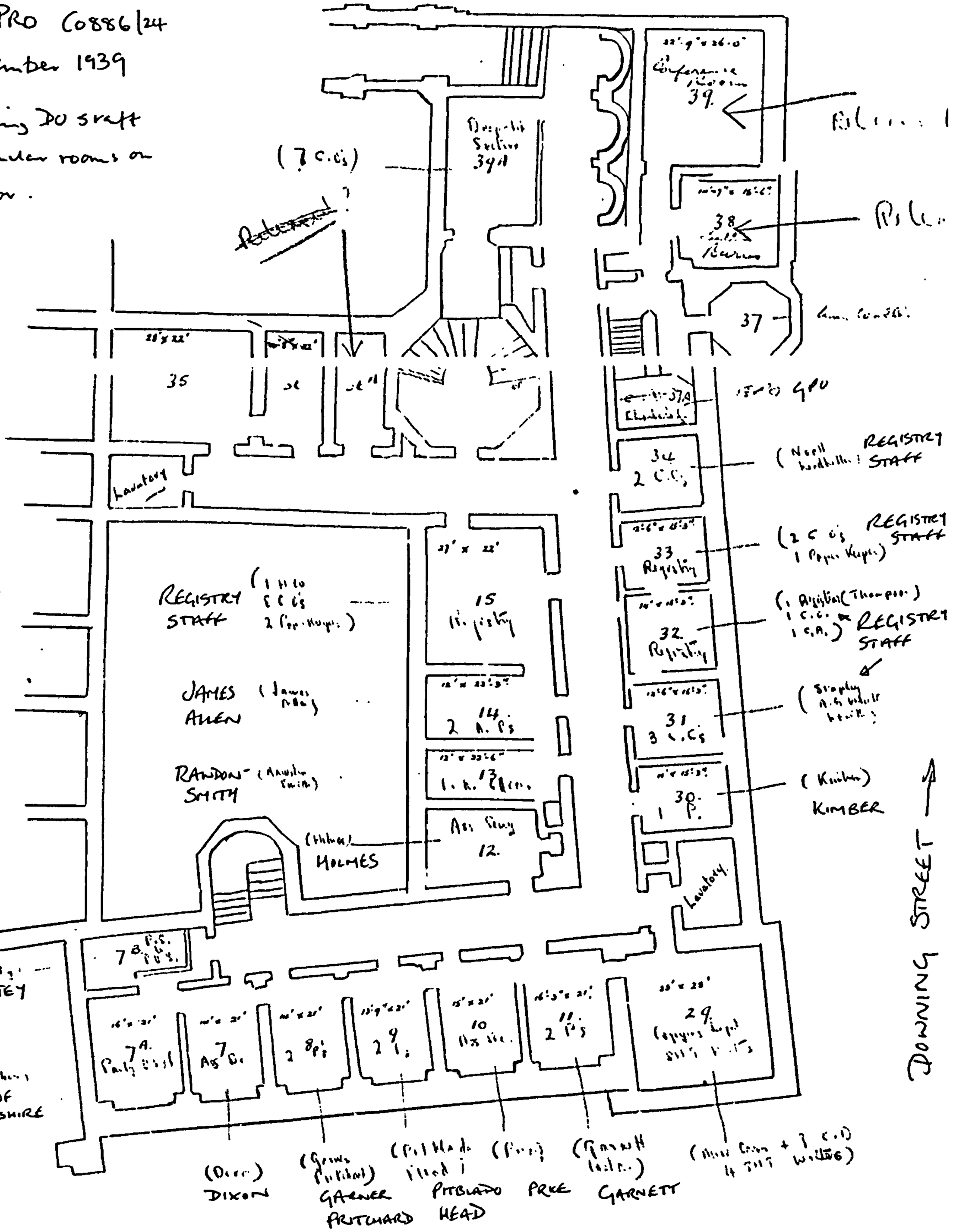
• Ground Floor → WHITEHALL, NORTH BLOCK

•

ource: PRO CO886/24

September 1939

l remaining DO staff
upied similar rooms on
first floor.



WHITEHALL →

The Dominions Office[1]
March 1940

*Square brackets denotes salaries; * denotes serving in UK High Commissioners' Offices in Dominions*

❑ **Secretary of State** [£5000]

Anthony Eden MC, MP

-Private Secretaries [£700]
N.E.Archer OBE
H.T.Bourdillon
Rear-Admiral Arthur Bromley CMG
J.P.L.Thomas MP (Parliamentary/unpaid)

❑ **Under Secretaries of State**

The Duke of Devonshire (Parliamentary) [£1500]
Sir Cosmo Parkinson KCB, KCMG, OBE (Permanent) [£3000]

❑ Deputy Under Secretary of State

Sir Eric Machtig KCMG, OBE [£2200]

❑ **Assistant Under Secretaries of State** [£1700]

J.E.Stephenson CVO, OBE
P.Liesching CMG

❑ **Assistant Secretaries** [£1150-£1500]

W.Bankes Amery CBE
(seconded to Ministry of Food)
M.E.Antrobus OBE
(in Dublin with the UK Representative to Eire)
N.E.Archer OBE
C.W.Dixon CMG; OBE
W.C.Hankinson OBE, MC*
S.L.Holmes MC
C.R.Price
H.N.Tait CMG
R.A.Wiseman CMG

❑ **Legal Advisor**

Sir Grattan Bushe KCMG, CB [£1400-£1650]

❑ **Principals** [£800-£1100]

P.A.Clutterbuck MC*
B.Cockram*
N.E.Costar
R.B.Ewbank CSI, CIE
(temporary)
J.J.S.Garner
W.J.Garnett MBE
W.G.Head MBE
G.Kimber
I.M.R.Maclennan*
J.R.S.Macleod
D.B.Pitblado
N.Pritchard
R.R.Sedgwick*
G.E.Boyd Shannon*
A.W.Snelling
G.W.Tory
(serving with HM Forces)

❑ **Assistant Principals** [£275-£625]

M.E.Allen
E.Anstey
(serving with HM Forces)
H.T.Bourdillon
D.G.Brock
(serving with HM Forces)
Hon. F.E.Cumming-Bruce*
J.M.C.James
Miss E.S.Nicholas MBE
P.Rogers
H.V.L.Swanzy
E.L.Sykes
(serving with HM Forces)

❑ **Staff Officers** [£550-£650]

E.A.Brett
R.L.Dixon
R.A.Hamblin
W.E.Noall MBE

❑ **Accountant**

W.G.Ives MBE [£650-£750]

❑ **Registrar**

H.W.Thompson MBE [£400-£525]

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[1] Source: *The Imperial Calender, 1940* (London: 1940)

Appendix Four

The Departmental Structure of the Dominions Office

[Source: *Joe Garner, The Commonwealth Office, 1925-68* (London: 1978) p.433]

Dominions Office
(circa. 1928)

Secretary of State

|

Parliamentary Under-Secretary

|

Permanent Under-Secretary

|

Assistant Under-Secretary

| | |

Dept A
Foreign Affairs
General

Dept B
Canada
Newfoundland
Irish Free State
Economic

Dept C
Australia
New Zealand
Union of South Africa
High Commission
Territories

Overseas Posts
High Commission in Canada

[Source: *Joe Garner, The Commonwealth Office, 1925-68* (London: 1978) p.433]

Dominions Office
(circa. 1938)

Secretary of State

Parliamentary Under-Secretary

Permanent Under-Secretary

Assistant Under-Secretary

Assistant Under-Secretary

Dept A
Constitutional

Dept B
Defence

Dept C
Economic

Dept D
Newfoundland
South Rhodesia
High Commission
Territories

Dept E
Migration

Overseas Posts

High Commission in Canada
High Commission in Commonwealth of Australia
High Commission in Union of South Africa

[Source: *Speech by Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, October 1939 (Avon Papers, University of Birmingham) AP20/7/51A*]

October 1939

"The permanent staff of the Dominions Office consists of a Permanent Under-Secretary and two Assistant Under-Secretaries of State; below them the Office is divided into five departments:

Department A deals with Political and Constitutional Questions of a war aspect, Foreign Affairs and Publicity. It is responsible for making the necessary arrangements for the discussions being held in London with the Dominion Cabinet Ministers. It works in close consultation with the Foreign Office and arranges for the supply of information on foreign affairs to the Dominion Prime Ministers; telegrams reporting the latest developments in the international field are sent to the Dominion Governments daily. This department also maintains close contact with the Ministry of Information and arranges, in co-operation with the Dominion authorities, for the dispatch of material suitable for publicity purposes.

Department B deals with General Naval, Military and Air Matters, Communications, Civil Aviation and Censorship. It maintains close contact with the Service Departments and handles all questions relating to the military effort of the Dominion Governments. It will be appreciated that the closest consultation with the Dominion Governments is required as to how best to co-ordinate the contribution which each of them can make to the common cause. This department is also responsible for sending daily to the Dominion Prime Ministers an appreciation of the military situation.

Department C deals with War Trade, Shipping, Contraband Questions, Exchange Control, Supply Questions (including munitions), matters of Export and Import Control and War Legislation regarding Shipping and Finance. This department works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Supply, the Board of Trade, the Treasury, the Ministry of Food, the Ministry of Shipping and the Ministry of Economic Warfare. The contribution which the Dominions can make in supplying food-stuffs and war materials may well prove to be decisive, and careful forethought is required in planning ahead the arrangements to be made. There are at present War Missions in Canada engaged in negotiations with the Canadian government and the Dominions Office acts as a clearing house for all correspondence with the members of the Missions.

Department D deals with Newfoundland, Southern Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories.

Department E deals with Political and Constitutional Questions (not having a war aspect), matters connected with the League of Nations, Treaties, Migration work and various miscellaneous questions. This Department is also responsible arranging, so far as the Dominions are concerned, for the distribution of presents and comforts to men serving in the Forces; as is known, there have been many generous offers of assistance in this way from bodies and persons in the Dominions. This Department is also responsible for the arrangements in connection with the establishment of the Empire Societies War Hospitalities Committee."

Appendix Five

Probable Attitude and Preparedness of the Dominions in the Event of War (1937)

PROBABLE ATTITUDE AND PREPAREDNESS OF THE DOMINIONS IN THE EVENT OF WAR.

The object of this memorandum is to indicate the state of preparedness for war of the various Dominions on the general lines of the appreciation of the position of the United Kingdom and of certain foreign countries contained in C.I.D. paper 1366-B. -- Before dealing with the detailed situation as regards personnel and material, it is desirable to attempt some estimate of the probability that the Dominions generally and individual Dominions in particular would in fact be prepared to co-operate with the United Kingdom in any war in which the latter might be engaged.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE DOMINIONS GENERALLY TO PARTICIPATION IN WAR

2. It is not possible to define in general the probable attitude of the Dominions, but it may be said that the question whether they would be likely to take an active part in any conflict in which the United Kingdom were engaged (and in some cases even to consider themselves in a state of belligerency) would depend, at least in certain of the Dominions, greatly on the origins of the conflict, and more particularly on the attitude adopted by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom during the stage before war had actually been declared. If war came about after a prolonged period of negotiation under League of Nations machinery, in which presumably all the Dominions as Members of the Assembly and at least one Dominion as a Member of the Council had been acting with the United Kingdom in a great combined effort for peace and if the enemy country were an indisputable aggressor in the sense of the Covenant of the League and the Kellogg Pact, it is difficult to suppose that the United Kingdom would not have the active support of the Dominions generally. (Of course, if the dispute which led to the violation of the

peace

pence was one in which one or more of the Dominions was actively interested, this would no doubt have a most potent effect in deciding the attitude of the Dominion or Dominions concerned). If, without any such period of negotiations, there were a direct attack on the United Kingdom itself, some at any rate of the Dominions could be relied on to come to the aid of the United Kingdom. If, however, there were no such direct attack on the United Kingdom and the war developed out of some purely European commitment of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, to which the Dominions were not parties, and without some previous period of League or other international efforts on behalf of peace in which the Dominions had been co-operating with the United Kingdom, there might well be some Dominion or Dominions from which it would be impossible to expect moral support, still less active assistance.

THE ATTITUDE OF INDIVIDUAL DOMINIONS TO PARTICIPATION IN WAR

3. Australia and New Zealand would not dispute that, if the United Kingdom were at war, they also as Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations would be at war, and further, in any major war in which it was clear that defeat would mean disaster for the United Kingdom and consequently for the British Empire as a whole and all the ideals for which it stands, they could be counted on to co-operate to the full extent of their available resources. In the case of New Zealand also, it must be remembered that the present Labour Government is a supporter of the principles of collective security and of international assistance to victims of aggression, even to the extent of the use of force to restrain the

the aggressor.

4. The position of Canada would be much more doubtful. There is a section of opinion in Canada which holds that it would be possible for Canada to be completely neutral when the United Kingdom was at war and, even if the Canadian Government did not adopt this extreme view and were prepared to accept the technical belligerency of Canada, the extent to which Canada would be likely to participate actively in the war would depend on circumstances. The attitude of the United States would largely affect that of Canada; if the United States were taking up a position of isolation from what they regarded as a purely European quarrel, the active intervention of Canada would be rendered extremely difficult, more especially if there were a prospect of the existing United States Neutrality legislation being applied to trade with Canada. What would be most likely to bring Canada whole-heartedly into the war would be a conviction that the war represented an attack by the enemy Power on the ideals of freedom and democracy and that the survival of those ideals might be gravely endangered by the failure of Canada to co-operate with the United Kingdom in their defence.

5. The Union of South Africa would definitely hold that it was possible for the Union to be completely neutral when the United Kingdom was at war (though it has been argued in the Union that this would not preclude the continued use of Simonstown by the United Kingdom when at war). The "British" section of the population would doubtless be anxious to come to the assistance of the United Kingdom in a time of danger, but generally the people of the Union would not be swayed by a consideration of this nature. Moreover, generally

generally the attitude of the Union in international affairs is sympathetic towards Germany and critical of France. What would be most likely to decide the attitude of the Union would be the probable effect of the war on Africa. If there were a direct threat to the Union, naturally the Union would act in self-defence. In the absence of such a direct threat, if it appeared that there was a serious risk that the war might result in the emergence or aggrandisement in Africa of a strong and militant foreign Power in a position to threaten a Union which would be left to its own resources for its defence, the Union would probably be prepared to co-operate with the United Kingdom, though even in this case it is most unlikely that the Union would be willing to take any action outside the limits of Africa.

6. The attitude of the Irish Free State would depend to a very great extent upon the general relations between the United Kingdom and the Irish Free State existing at the time. Mr. de Valera has announced publicly that he would not permit the territory of the Irish Free State to be used as a base for attack upon Great Britain by a hostile Power but, if the existing dispute between the United Kingdom and the Free State remained unsettled, it would be useless to expect much more than this or to look for any extensive measure of active co-operation from the Free State Government, and there is indeed the possibility that in such circumstances the Irish Free State might definitely declare its neutrality. At the same time, there are signs that the Free State Government appreciate the menace to small nations involved in the emergence of dictator States and, if the Irish Free State felt that its own position was threatened by such a Power, it would no doubt be prepared, irrespective

irrespective of the dispute with this country, to take such measures of defence as it considered desirable in its own interest. If, on the other hand, a general settlement with the Irish Free State were reached, it should be possible, as part of such a settlement to arrive at some understanding with the Free State Government in regard to defence co-operation in time of war.

STRENGTH OF THE VARIOUS DOMINION FORCES

7. The following paragraphs give the latest available figures of present strength of the forces of the various Dominions and Southern Rhodesia (and in some cases possible developments) and particulars as to the conditions of service.

CANADA

8. Royal Canadian Navy:

4 destroyers

1 trawler minesweeper

3 auxiliary vessels.

(The Canadian Government are considering the purchase of two more destroyers from the Royal Navy next year and four modern minesweepers are being constructed locally).

Army:

Permanent Force	4,225
Non-Permanent Militia	46,340

All men between 18 and 60 are liable for service in and beyond Canada in defence of the Dominion. In peace time recruitment is on a voluntary basis, but there is power to recruit by ballot if the necessity should arise.

Air Force

Air Force:

284 aircraft of which many are obsolete or obsolescent.

(According to a recent statement by the Minister of Defence the Canadian Air Force is to be increased by 102 new aeroplanes to be manufactured in Canada during the current financial year).

AUSTRALIA

9. Royal Australian Navy:

4	cruisers
1	flotilla leader and 4 destroyers
1	seaplane carrier
2	sloops
1	survey ship
1	oiler

One of the cruisers, the "Australia", is due to be modernized and the actual number of ships in commission is

3	cruisers
1	flotilla leader and 2 destroyers
2	sloops
1	survey ship.

Army:

Permanent Forces	2,300
Militia (Citizen) Force	35,000.

The peace time force is designed to form the nucleus of a Field Army of 2 cavalry and 5 infantry divisions. All men between 18 and 60 are liable, in time of war, to serve in the Citizen Forces, but this liability does not

extend

extend to service beyond the limits of the Commonwealth. Compulsory service in peace time has been suspended since 1929.

Air Force:

8 squadrons with a first line strength of 96 aircraft.

(It is hoped to form 9 more squadrons with a strength of 108 aircraft, making a total first line strength of 198, by the end of 1938).

NEW ZEALAND

10. New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy:

2 cruisers
2 sloops
1 minesweeping trawler
1 depot ship

Army:

Regular Forces	548
Territorial Force	8,282

The peace time force is designed so as to be capable in time of war of expanding to 1 infantry division, 1 mounted rifles division and 1 medium artillery brigade plus coast defence troops. In time of war all men between 17 and 55 are liable to serve in any part of New Zealand but cannot be compelled to serve outside it. Compulsory service in peace time has been suspended since 1930.

Air Force:

2 flights of bomber aircraft (12 Vildebeest)
1 nucleus flight (3 Fairey III F) for naval co-operation.
Some training aircraft.

(In

(In accordance with the recommendation of the Cochrane Report, it has been decided that the New Zealand Air Force shall consist of 2 permanent squadrons of medium bomber aircraft, with the necessary reserves and repair facilities, to be ready by the end of 1939.

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

11. Army:

Permanent Force*	3,017
Coast Garrison Force	875
Active Citizen Force	13,586

* including Air Force personnel.

Every citizen between 17 and 60 inclusive is liable to render in time of war personal service in defence of the Union in any part of South Africa whether within or outside the Union. The peace time force is recruited primarily on a voluntary basis but should there be an insufficient number of volunteers it can be completed to establishment by ballot based on compulsory service.

Air Force:

5 squadrons

(The Union Government have bought 100 "Hart" aircraft from the United Kingdom Government and are constructing (apart from the engines) 100 more for training purposes).

IRISH FREE STATE

13. Army:

Regular Forces	5,853
Volunteer Force	18,000

Air Force

Air Force:

1 squadron with 4 aircraft capable of use in war and 14 suitable for use in training.

SOUTHERN RHODESIA

13. Army:

Permanent Force:-

(a)	B.S.A. Police	557
(b)	Staff Corps	70
	Territorial Force	602

Air Force:

6 aircraft (Harts) to be used for training purposes.

All citizens are liable to compulsory service in defence of the Colony. The peace time force is recruited primarily on a voluntary basis, but should there be an insufficient number of volunteers, it can be brought up to establishment by ballot based on compulsory service.

Appendix Six

Procedure for the Declaration of War (1937)

D. 26/4. 23rd December, 1937.

SECRET

Dear Malkin,

I enclose a copy of the memorandum on procedure for declaration of war revised as a result of the discussion in Batterbee's room yesterday.

As regards the next step, as you know, Batterbee has drafted a memorandum on certain wider questions relating to the possible attitude of the Dominions in time of war, with the idea that, if the Secretary of State approves, the matter might be discussed with Hankey and probably referred to a special inter-departmental Committee. Pending a decision on this question, we are not proposing to take any action in regard to the question of procedure referred to in the present memorandum.

Before any further steps are taken with regard to Batterbee's draft memorandum, we wish to have a discussion with you as to its contents and, as a preliminary

SIR WILLIAM MALKIN, C.C.M.G., C.B., K.C.

preliminary to such a discussion, we should be grateful if you could let us have your views on the extent to which action on certain matters referred to in the War Book could be taken in a Dominion if that Dominion were neutral in the accepted sense of the term. For this purpose, I enclose a note setting out under general headings the forms of War Book action which we have in mind. As regards Heading I, the Foreign Enlistment Act recently passed in Canada would no doubt be relevant.

Yours sincerely,

(Sd.) C.W. Dixon

D.O. 35/5413

PROCEDURE FOR DECLARATION OF WAR.

Article 1 of the Hague Convention of the 18th October, 1907, relative to the Opening of Hostilities, provides that "The Contracting Powers recognise that hostilities between them must not commence without a previous and explicit warning, in the form of either a declaration of war, giving reasons, or an ultimatum with a conditional declaration of war". Oppenheim's International Law defines a declaration of war as a communication by one State to another that the condition of peace between them has come to an end and a condition of war has taken its place, and the writer holds that such a communication must be in the form of a written document handed over to the other party by or through an accredited representative. (As explained in paragraph 8 below, the observance of the rule laid down in the Hague Convention has been by no means universal, especially in recent years.)

2. In addition it is customary to announce formally to the nation the existence of a state of war and to communicate the fact to the diplomatic representatives of neutral Powers.

3. In considering the form of the declaration of war it is desirable to distinguish three main ways in which this country might become involved in war.

(1) There might be a declaration of war by this country or an ultimatum by this country followed by a declaration of war.

(2) There might be a declaration of war by the foreign country or an ultimatum by that country followed by a declaration of war.

(3) There might be an attack on this country without any formal declaration of war.

4. A declaration of war on behalf of this country would be required in case (1) and might also be required in case (3) since it would be necessary for His Majesty's Representative at the foreign capital concerned to ask for his passports and, in so doing, he would have to make some statement to the foreign Government as to his reasons, in the course of which he would probably have to say that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom considered that a state of war existed.

5. The documents referred to in paragraph 2 would be required whatever the circumstances in which this country were involved in war.

6. It may be assumed that in fact this country would not go to war except (a) in self-defence, i.e. as a result of an actual attack by a foreign country or a grave menace of attack, or (b) in pursuance of an international obligation. In the latter case, it is possible that, before there were any formal declaration of war by this country, there would, as in 1914, be an ultimatum. The form of that ultimatum would probably determine the form of a subsequent declaration of war.

7. In considering the question of procedure, it is necessary to take into account the position in relation to the constitutional developments within the British Empire. In 1914 it was recognised that the Dominions could not be committed to active participation in war without their consent but there was then no doubt that, if one part of the Empire was at war, the whole Empire was at war. There is now a body of opinion in some, at any rate, of the Dominions which would hold that it would be open to a Dominion not merely to decline any active participation in a war in which another Member of the British Commonwealth was engaged but definitely to declare its neutrality in the sense of not being at war at-all in such circumstances. This view has never been accepted by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. It would naturally be the endeavour of His Majesty's Government in the United

Kingdom in any major crisis to secure that all His Majesty's Governments in the Dominions would participate actively in the event of war and would at the very least consider themselves in a state of belligerency, but it must be recognised that it is at any rate highly likely that, if the occasion were to arise to declare that this country was in a state of war, it would be impossible at that moment to say whether some at least of the other Members of the Commonwealth would regard themselves as equally involved. It would, therefore, be important that the forms employed by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom while not being inconsistent with the view that the Dominions were automatically involved, should not in terms be open to the construction that the Dominions were thereby necessarily involved. Equally it would be necessary that the forms should not be such as to debar any participating Dominion Government from issuing its own declaration of war if it so desired. In connection with the latter point it must be borne in mind that some Dominions now have their own diplomatic representatives at certain foreign capitals: thus at Berlin there are Union and Irish Free State Ministers, at Rome there is a Union Minister and at Tokyo there is a Canadian Minister.

8. The Inter-Imperial difficulties indicated in the preceding paragraph would be minimised if, in the event of this country being involved in war, either the declaration proceeded from the other side - case (2) in paragraph 5 above - or failing that if there were no formal declaration of war at all - case (3) in paragraph 5. As regards case (2), however, it must be borne in mind that since the Great War the practice of formally declaring war as a prelude to hostilities as prescribed by the Hague Convention seems largely (if not entirely) to have fallen into disuse,

and even in 1914 in the case of the war with Turkey there was no formal declaration of war on either side. It is very doubtful therefore how far we could count on a foreign country formally declaring war on this country before opening hostilities. Further, as regards case (3) it may be that, as mentioned in paragraph 4 above, a formal declaration of war on the part of this country would be definitely desirable ~~in order~~ to regularise the position. It is clear, therefore, that we must envisage the possibility of a formal declaration of war by this country being necessary.

9. In the light of the above it is necessary to consider the form of the various documents and, in particular, whether they should refer to a state of war between the King and the foreign Power concerned or to the Governments or countries.

10. (a) Ultimatum and (b) Declaration of War.

In 1914 the communications addressed to the German Government (Annexes A and B) made no mention of the King. The ultimatum referred to His Majesty's Government, while the actual declaration of war referred to a state of war between the respective countries. There was no formal document in the name of the King declaring war, though Royal Proclamations issued in this country dealing with particular subjects such as Trading with the Enemy opened with the recital "Whereas a state of war exists between Us and ....".

11. Having regard to the inter-Imperial considerations mentioned in paragraph 7 it seems inevitable that, in the event of the necessity arising in future, the procedure adopted should be on the lines of that adopted in 1914 when the ultimatum was expressed on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the declaration [redacted] referred

referred to a state of war between the two countries. Moreover, it is suggested that on general grounds the declaration should be so worded as to make it clear that this country was acting in self-defence or in pursuance of an international obligation.

18. (c) Announcement to the Nation.

In 1914 this took the form of a notification in the "London Gazette" (Annex C) and referred to a state of war between the respective countries. For the reasons already given it would seem necessary to follow the same course on a future occasion. There would however be much to be said, at any rate in any case where it was clear that all the Members of the Commonwealth would be participating in the war, for the issue in this country of a Proclamation in the name of the King declaring the existence of a state of war and indicating briefly the circumstances. There would be some precedent for this in the procedure adopted on the outbreak of the Crimean War when there was a formal Declaration by Her Majesty which was published in a special supplement to the "London Gazette" and, apparently, read by the Serjeant at Arms from the steps of the Royal Exchange. It would be desirable, in order to avoid constitutional difficulties that any such Proclamation should not be addressed to His Majesty's subjects or any category of them but should be in general terms, e.g. referring to "all whom it may concern". If this procedure were being followed in the United Kingdom it would be open to any Dominion which so desired, e.g. the Union of South Africa, to arrange for the issue of a similar Proclamation by the King on the advice of Dominion Ministers addressed to the citizens of the Dominion.

18. (d) Communication to neutral Powers.

The form used in 1914 (Annex D) referred to the existence of a state of war between His Majesty and the foreign Power concerned. If the other documents referred to Governments or countries the logical corollary would be that similar phraseology should be employed in this case but the matter is not one of great importance and the question is one which will require consideration in the light of the decision reached on the questions of principle dealt with in the earlier part of the memorandum.

Appendix Seven

Position of the Dominions in the Event of War (1937)

POSITION OF THE DOMINIONS IN THE EVENT OF WAR.

"Common belligerency" has hitherto been generally regarded as one of the axioms of the British Commonwealth and it has been assumed that the abandonment of this doctrine would mean the end of the Commonwealth to the extent that any Member of the Commonwealth which declared itself neutral when other Members of the Commonwealth were at war could no longer be regarded as a Member. This view is of course based on the doctrine that the King is one and indivisible. Clearly we ought to do all in our power to uphold this doctrine, and further we ought to make it the object of our diplomacy to see that no question of Dominion neutrality will arise.

But if, notwithstanding all our efforts, one or more of the Dominions insisted in the event of war on declaring their neutrality, what attitude are we to take up? Are we quite clear that such a declaration of neutrality should be regarded as severing from the Commonwealth any Dominion making it? Is there possibly a half-way house between the position of a Member of the Commonwealth as we have hitherto understood it and that of a foreign country - a half-way position which might be summed up

up in the formula "not pledged to fight, but pledged to help and not to hinder"? And if it is impossible to secure the active participation of the Dominions may there not possibly be advantage to this country in being assured that certain important nations are pledged not only in no circumstances to go to war with us but also in no circumstances to give any assistance to our enemies, even if that were the extent of the assistance they were prepared to give?

Even if Canada, the Union of South Africa and the Irish Free State cannot be counted upon, in the event of a war in which the United Kingdom was engaged, to accept the doctrine of "common belligerency", there can be no doubt that they would be willing to accept a half-way position. What exactly is the extent of the "half-way" assistance on which it would be safe to rely is somewhat difficult to define and might vary with the different Dominions. In the case of Canada and the Union, they would almost certainly be prepared to grant us

facilities

facilities in some at any rate of their harbours (there is some evidence for thinking that the Union regard themselves as pledged to adopt this attitude in the case of Simonstown) in addition to being prepared to supply us with foods raw material and munitions and to deny them to the enemy. As regards the Irish Free State, Mr. de Valera has stated that he would not allow Irish Free State territory to be used as a base for attack on this country: as to more positive assistance, the question of facilities in the reserved ports presents a difficult problem, and pending coming discussions it is not possible to attempt any forecast of the solution that may be reached; but there seems no reason to suppose that the Irish Free State would not be prepared otherwise to take up an attitude similar to that outlined in the preceding sentence of this paragraph.

From the international point of view, questions may be raised whether foreign countries would be ready to recognise such a "half-way" position on the part of the Dominions. Foreign nations, however, have now grown so accustomed

accustomed to regard the relationship of the Members of the Commonwealth as something unique and abnormal, incapable of being fitted into the ordinary conceptions of international law, that probably one more abnormality would not surprise them. Moreover, if in a future war certain Dominions declared their "benevolent neutrality" - if the attitude above outlined can be so described - and the foreign nation or nations at war with us refused to recognise such an attitude on their part, the only likely result would be that the Dominions in question would sooner or later be drawn into the war on our side.

Looking at the matter from the military aspect, war has become more and more a matter of the machine and of munitions, and it may be that in the wars of the future a supply of munitions may be even more important than the supply of men: far more men will be required to manufacture the aeroplane and the tank than to man them. Now that the United States market is closed to us as a source of supply in war so long as the Neutrality Act is in force - and in any case it must remain a doubtful factor - it is more than ever important that we should so far keep Canada within the Commonwealth that she can be counted on as a potential source of war material. Canada as a benevolent neutral, supplying us with munitions, is not so valuable as Canada actively belligerent, but she is worth a good deal more than a second United States. On the defence side, the question is one of immediate practical importance,

for

for our war Book is at present based on the assumption that in a major war all the Dominions would enter the war simultaneously with us. If there is any doubt about this assumption the problems arising out of that doubt would seem to require immediate examination.

There is possibly one more aspect of the matter to be considered. Looking ahead, with the political side at least of the League of Nations crumbling before our eyes, should we not be wise to preserve a certain fluidity of conception with regard to the Commonwealth relationship? Sir Miles Lampson has suggested that some form of attachment to the British Commonwealth may be the solution of the Egyptian problem, and the problem of 'Iraq is very similar to that of Egypt: in each case the loss of authority by the League has not increased the chances of success of the present solution of the problem. Under the terms of the present Treaties, Egypt and 'Iraq are pledged (not to fight, but) to come to our assistance to the extent of affording us facilities in any war in which we are engaged not contrary to the League Covenant or the Pact of Paris. In fact, their position is very similar to the "half-way" position outlined above. This may be thought a somewhat far-fetched consideration, but in the present state of international affairs it may be wise at times to scan the possibilities on the horizon.

On the other hand, the objections, especially at the present time, to whittling away

any of the duties and responsibilities of the Members of the British Commonwealth are so obvious that it is unnecessary to elaborate them. If, however, as might very probably be the case, it would be impossible in an emergency to preserve the recognition of those responsibilities as they have hitherto been understood, true wisdom would seem to lie in our recognising the facts and seeing how best we could get the maximum of advantage from the new situation.

From every point of view the subject is one of such paramount importance that I suggest that it ought to be explored by an Inter-departmental Committee without delay.

(W1)

December, 1937.

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